

T.C.

İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAMME



A FEMINIST READING OF WILLIAM M. THACKERAY'S *VANITY FAIR* AND
CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE*

MA THESIS

MOHAMMED AL-HASOON

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İSTANBUL, JUNE 2022

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SUPERVISOR

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PREFACE

Firstly, I would like to show gratitude for my supervisor, Asst. Prof. Dr. Javid ALIYEV, for his valuable support, help, guidance, and patience throughout this journey. It was a pleasure communicating with him participating in his classes during the academic year. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. C. Günseli İŞÇİ for expanding my horizon with her tremendous knowledge and experience.

I would also like to express my huge gratitude to my father, the person who have cared, supported, and helped me the most. My mother is indeed worthy of huge thanks for her unlimited support, care and love. I also thank my brothers and sister for their love and support. I thank my wife, Yasemin, for her help, support, and patience, throughout this journey.

I should not forget to thank and appreciate the two friends that I have met while embarking on this journey, Lwaa and Karam.

Lastly, I am forever grateful for Dr. Mohammed Amro. His knowledge, help, support, advice, and understanding, made me realize the truth of myself and the world around.

İSTANBUL, 2022

Mohammed AL-HASOON

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ÖZET

WILLIAM M. THACKERAY'İN VANITY FAIR VE CHARLOTTE BRONTË'NİN JANE EYRE'NİN FEMİNİST OKUNUŞU

Bu tez, William Makepeace Thackeray'ın *Gurur Dünyası* (1848) eserinin en bilindik karakteri Rebecca Sharp'ın yaşamını, Charlotte Brontë'nin *Jane Eyre*'inin kahramanı Jane Eyre'i, ve her iki karakterin erkek egemenliğindeki ve maddeci on dokuzuncu yüzyıl toplumundaki mücadelelerini ele almaktadır. Karakterlerin yazarlarca tasvirlerinin ve anlatıdaki yerlerinin çözümlemesinin yapıldığı bu çalışma feminizm kuramından faydalanmakta, bunun için de Simone de Beauvoir'ın *The Second Sex* eserinde sunduğu fikirleri odak almaktadır. Viktorya döneminde kadına olan yaklaşımlar ve bu karakterlerin kıyaslanması adına aynı dönemin kuramları da çalışmada kullanılmıştır. Toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri, toplumsal sınıf, evlilik ve annelik ile yazarların bu mefhumlara yönelik görüşleri bu araştırmada tartışılmaktadır. Toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin toplumda kadınların kişiliklerini şekillendirmesine yine bu çalışmada ışık tutulmaktadır. Son olarak bu tez, ait oldukları kendi yazın türleri sebebiyle aralarında büyük farklar bulunmasına karşın birçok benzerlik gösteren iki kadın karakter arasında bir karşılaştırma yapmaktadır.

Mohammed AL-HASOON, 2022

Anahtar sözcükler: Feminizm, Simone de Beauvoir, toplumsal cinsiyet, *Vanity Fair*, *Jane Eyre*

ABSTRACT

A FEMINIST READING OF WILLIAM M. THACKERAY'S *VANITY FAIR* AND CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S *JANE EYRE*

This thesis highlights the lives of the most notable character in William M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1848), Rebecca Sharp, and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre's* (1847) heroine, Jane Eyre, as they both struggle in the materialistic male-dominated society of the 19th century. In analysing the two characters and their portrayal by the authors, this thesis employs the theory of feminism, which aims to achieve equality between men and women, concentrating on Simone de Beauvoir's ideas presented in *The Second Sex*. The theories of Victorian womanhood are also utilized to compare the stereotypes regarding women in the Victorian era and the two characters. This research discusses issues like gender roles, social status, love, marriage, and motherhood, in addition to the authors' own views and ideas. Finally, this thesis concludes with a comparison between the female characters in the two novels as they share many similarities despite the gap between them. Thus, the thesis's main purpose of establishing a comparative study is achieved.

Mohammed AL-HASOON, 2022

Keywords: Feminism, Simone de Beauvoir, gender, *Vanity Fair*, *Jane Eyre*

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, women have found enjoying the same societal rights and privileges as men difficult. This difficulty has been due to the notion of patriarchy, which regards men as superior beings to women and gives men the right to exploit and control women. Patriarchy has permeated social structures and has complicated women's tasks in attaining the goals of feminism. Despite being a complicated concept, the origins of feminism are simply attributed to an effort to improve women's lives. Feminism is a theory, or ideology, that promotes equal rights in the economic, political, and social domains for men and women. Feminists believe that human beings are born free and equal regardless of any man-made notions. The term "feminism" is applied to women's struggle for equality with men and for recognition as valuable members of society. The major objective of a patriarchal society is to maintain women's subordination. Consequently, women and men have distinct roles in patriarchal societies. While women are supposed to be wives and mothers, love their children, and revere their husbands, men are expected to be the ruler of the home, achieve economic success, and provide for their families.

At the start of the 19th century, women demanded gender equality but were unable to overcome male dominance. However, feminist views and the women's movement gained popularity after the 1850s. After years of hardship and injustice, women are now playing a vital part in society as legislators, socialists, and economists. These gains were possible due to the rise of feminism, which emphasizes women's rights. Throughout the historical periods of feminism, feminists have emphasized that social inequality is not a result of nature but rather of societal conditions that need to be addressed and altered. Feminists seek changes that enable women to pursue livelihoods more suited to their interests and skills than those imposed by society, customs, or religion.

Literature plays a vital role in the development of society, exposing the flaws and injustice within it. Commonly, literature reflects society and vice versa. As a

cultural characteristic, literature reflects contemporary events and human experiences. Victorian literature reflected the reality of English culture, which was patriarchal and limited the roles of women to the domestic realm. Victorian literary works reflected this paradigm as male writers dominated the field of literature. Among literary styles, novels have a great influence on the readers. Novels have been utilized to address a variety of concerns throughout the years, becoming a tool to influence diverse communities worldwide. In the Victorian period, reading became a favorite leisure activity for many high society women. Thus, many literary novels served as conduct books, implementing ideas and notions considered ideal.

This thesis examines the characters of Rebecca Sharp from William Makepeace Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair* (1848) and Jane Eyre from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847). These works were written during the Victorian era, dated during Queen Victoria's reign (1837–1901), which was renowned for its political stability and stringent cultural and moral standards. *Vanity Fair* (1848) is a picaresque novel that follows the lives of Rebecca Sharp and Amelia Sedley as they roam different societies undergoing multiple experiences. The novel contains many themes typical for Victorians, as described in the first chapter: Human sexuality as taboo, identity strongly determined by class and race, gender roles dictating that men have access to all life endeavors while women's proper place is at home. *Vanity Fair*'s main title was inspired by *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a religious allegory written by John Bunyan in 1678. Bunyan names one of the cities Vanity, the home of a great festival called Vanity Fair. The city is a wicked place full of desires and lusts. The festival is full of vanities, and each Christian has to go through it on their journey to salvation. At the fair, the faithful and the believer are mocked. Thackeray uses this description to illustrate that his society shares similar features to Bunyan's Vanity Fair. However, Thackeray modified the meaning of this scene. In his novel, there is no eternal reward but rather an earthly one: money, power, or social position. The novel was published with a provocative subtitle: *A Novel Without a Hero*, as all the main characters in the novel lack the necessary characteristics of a typical 19th-century hero/heroine. Becky Sharp is presented as a roguish and naughty person who uses her charms to capture men's hearts to climb

to high society. Numerous critics see the work as a satire of a conservative society and its view of gender roles (i.e., the notion of an ideal man and an ideal woman) since men and women do not act honorably in this novel. The whole narrative is filled with “lies, deceit, secrets, and silences” (Bodenheimer, 1995, p. 67).

The novel follows two women from two different social backgrounds, and despite the author’s focus on Amelia Sedley in the first pages, Rebecca Sharp is considered the main protagonist in the novel who roams Thackeray’s fair of vanity. Using a feminist approach from the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, Thackeray’s depiction of his protagonist, including her appearance, characteristics, and relationships with men, is examined in this thesis. Her role as a woman is also analyzed, as well as the prejudices she receives from people in her environment.

The second novel, *Jane Eyre* (1847), was initially released as *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography*, and its author was listed as Currer Bell. Charlotte Brontë adopted a masculine pen name to avoid the heavy criticism from her readers who thought that women were not qualified to write literature, especially if the literary work contained a romantic element. In many ways, the novel is ahead of its time because of Jane’s autonomous character and the exploration of primary issues such as religion, class, and sexuality. The book incorporates aspects of social critique with a strong Christian moral foundation (Gilbert, 1979, p. 59). Brontë presents Jane as a rebellious, plain girl who refuses to kneel in front of unjust authorities and preserves her dignity and autonomy despite constant temptations.

The work is written in the first person from the protagonist’s viewpoint. The name of the work carries the protagonist’s name, which emphasizes the heroic element in the novel and Jane’s role as center of the story. Her name suggests her invisibility as air; she is the heir of her uncle or the heir of nothingness. This name can also refer to her spirit being similar to air, or “secretly choking with ire” (Gilber, 1979, p. 342). Furthermore, the novel reflects multiple personal experiences in Brontë’s life. Brontë’s attendance at an uncomfortable boarding school and her work as a governess were indeed main determiners in developing Lowood School and Thornfield Hall.

The main purpose of this thesis is to establish a comparison between a novel that has not been studied and appreciated heavily by feminist critics and a prominent feminist one, which has frequently been hailed by feminists. Feminist critics' seeming avoidance of *Vanity Fair* is explained by Micael Clarke (1995), who claims, "one explanation for this anomaly is that Thackeray's complex, highly allusive, and ironic narrative voice is rather perplexing, and so *Vanity Fair* is not taught nor read nearly so often as it deserves" (p. 69). In the novel, Thackeray's ambiguity and ambivalence toward his female protagonist is clear. This ambivalence perhaps reflects the perspective of a Victorian author, in addition to his personal experiences with women. Another reason for this anomaly is that the modern feminist criticism has focused mainly on women's literature in discussing the gender construction of the Victorian society. The primary focus of feminist critics has been on female heroines (e.g., *Jane Eyre*) who criticize the traditional system of patriarchy while maintaining their honor and nobility. Men's novels placed characters inside a "broader intellectual framework" that defined the narrative's artistic construction, while women's novels "concentrated on the characters themselves" (Showalter, 1985, p. 88). Moreover, both novels' protagonists share a willingness to reach their goals while relying on themselves and not on conventional notions prevalent in the 19th century. As a result, rather than adhering to what is required, they oppose and develop the attributes that they believe more acceptably characterize them. These actions support them in retaining their identities, as they are not dependent on being the Other. Consequently, Rebecca and Jane closely follow Beauvoir's notion: "essence does not precede existence: in pure subjectivity, the human being is not anything" (p. 319).

This work examines women's struggle against patriarchal society and highlights feminism's attempts to eradicate women's oppression globally and to push for women's equal rights and recognition in all sectors. This research is a comparative study between the two novels regarding the issues of gender. The study also attempts to answer the following questions: What are the gender roles in *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*? What are the Victorian theories of womanhood presented in the two novels? How do these theories shape the characters of the Rebecca Sharp and Jane Eyre in the two novels? What are the restrictions that hold

the two characters from being true to themselves and to others? What are the barriers that the two characters overcome in order to achieve their goals? What are the similarities and differences between the two characters?

This thesis is divided into three chapters in addition to the introduction and conclusion. Chapter one is titled: Feminist Critical Theory, and it defines the theory of feminism and mentions its aims. It also deals with the situation of women in Victorian England which marked the first wave of feminism. Chapter one discusses various issues regarding women at that time, such as education, work outside of the house, and marriage. In this part, the notion of “ideal womanhood” is explained in detail. Popular terms such as “fallen women” and “angel in the house” are also discussed.

The last part of the first chapter discusses Simone de Beauvoir and the concept of “the Other”, a concept is developed by de Beauvoir to illustrate how the binary male–female gender relationship functions. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir explains how myths greatly contribute to creating women’s gender and identity throughout history. Beauvoir observes that most faiths and ideologies have traditionally relied on myths as a tool and baseline. For example, in the Christian dogmas, Eve is created from Adam’s curved rib. Eve also works as a provider for Adam’s happiness when he was lonely. Furthermore, Eve is portrayed as the main source of humans’ misery as she tempted Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. Therefore, myths are essential in forming and developing society’s ideas in such a way that women are seen as inferior beings.

Beauvoir states that women gain proper social acceptance through marriage and childbearing. Male dominance in politics, economy, culture, and every aspect linked with the public realm is demonstrated by relegating women to this role in the domestic domain. According to Beauvoir, marriage is an effective strategy for securing male supremacy. Women are used as biological and social reproduction devices and, as a result, are isolated from public and political life. Beauvoir denies the “maternal instinct”, which has been used as an excuse for preparing girls to be mothers simply because it is “natural”. As an existentialist, she states that women have the freedom to consciously be righteous mothers or cruel ones. She explains

that women have historically been defined in relation to men. Thus, women have become the Other while men are the One. Beauvoir argues that it is incorrect to declare that motherhood makes a woman tangibly equal to a man. Beauvoir considers parenthood the major factor in women being categorized as others. According to her, women are taught to regard childbirth as crucial to their lives and a way to achieve their destiny. Finally, Beauvoir emphasizes that the patriarchal figures and authorities invest their efforts to place women in the category of the Other, the insignificant and the object.

The second and third chapters address research problems, apply feminist theory through the perspective of Beauvoir, and examine the two protagonists in *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre* through the perspective of Simone de Beauvoir. Gender issues are addressed to realize the study's purpose. Chapter two is titled William Thackeray's Portrayal of Ambivalent Female Agency in *Vanity Fair*. It analyzes the character of *Vanity Fair's* main protagonist Rebecca Sharp and her quest for a better social position throughout the novel. This chapter addresses the hardships Rebecca faces at an early age due to her gender and low-class status and illustrates how Thackeray portrays her from his masculine perspective. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the images, similes, and metaphors he uses in describing her and her actions, in addition to outlining Rebecca's main traits and explaining how she uses them to shape her life. All her actions and the prejudices and obstacles that she faces due to her female identity are analyzed according to a feminist approach. The analysis includes her quest for economic, social, and political independence and discusses how these elements are key to achieving gender equality. The discussion debunks the popular 19th-century idea of women having less intellectual ability than men. This chapter also compares the stereotypical image of the "ideal woman" in Victorian times with the character of Rebecca as a bachelorette, wife, and mother, explaining Thackeray's commentary and attitude toward her and her society. Finally, the chapter answers the question of whether Thackeray followed the typical trend in presenting women that had been used during his era by male writers. Chapter three is titled Charlotte Brontë's Portrayal of Women's Objectification in *Jane Eyre*. This chapter studies the heroine Jane Eyre's life as she suffers from unjust treatment in her childhood and adulthood. The discussion

provides insight into Brontë's use of symbolism in portraying the patriarchal figures in Jane's life. This chapter highlights Jane's refusal to adhere to the patriarchal system, which treats and views women as objects, enabling her to achieve autonomy while maintaining her romantic life and her Christian morals. This chapter's discussion emphasizes Jane's main quest to establish an identity and achieve her independence. Finally, this chapter focuses on how Jane repelled the attempts made by the male characters in the novel (including her lover, Rochester) to place her in the category of the Other. Finally, a comparison is made between Rebecca Sharp and Jane Eyre to achieve the thesis's main goal.



FIRST CHAPTER

1. FEMINIST CRITICAL THEORY

For many centuries, history has recorded enormous contributions made by men as they have participated in lifestyles that offer them access to various sectors with full rights. Meanwhile, women have been engaged mainly in the domestic realm under the umbrella of men with limited opportunities outside of this realm. This situation has been the main topic for many activists and writers. American feminist writer and activist Betty Freidan (1963), who is considered one of the most prominent feminist figures in the 20th century and contributed in the advancement of the women's rights movement, regards feminist issues as "the problem that has no name" (p. 7).

Defining feminism is not an easy task, especially today. Modern feminism is connected to various directions and tendencies. Many people confuse feminism with lesbianism or attach it exclusively to middle- and upper-class white societies (Hooks, 2000, p. i). Thus, defining feminism may be a hard task for feminists themselves. For example, British author and critic Rebecca West, known for her bold statements and criticism of women's oppression and subjugation, has an interesting definition of feminism as she considers every act that separates her from male dominance a feminist one: "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is; I only know that people call me feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat" (Osborne, 2001, p. 9). Generally, feminism is not only the belief in social, political, and economic equality of the two sexes but also the criticism of how various societies favor men and how women are treated within those societies (Madsen, 2000, p. 48). Karen Offen (1988) provides a clear and precise definition of feminism: "a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for sociopolitical change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any

given society” (p. 151). Moreover, John Scott and Gordon Marshall (2009) developed a simple definition of feminism that restricts it to a social movement that combines theory and political implementation and aims to achieve equality between men and women. Scott and Marshall add the following:

Its origins in 18th-century England are associated with Mary Wollstonecraft’s plea for the rights of women. At the turn to the 20th century, the term referred to suffragettes and other campaigners for votes for women and women’s access to education and professions (p. 250).

Finally, Hooks’s (2000) explanation is that the greatest problem for feminism is the lack of a real definition. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the composed definition for feminism, which is the aim to achieve equality between women and men. A problem arises because men themselves are not socially equal (p. i). In addition, the oppression of women is connected to social class, race, and ethnicity, which increases the challenge to develop a true and specific definition of feminism. Simply, feminism is a movement that aims to abolish sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression in general (Hooks, 2000, p. i).

The primary goal of the theory of feminism is to change the practice of demeaning women in society (which is mainly caused by their suppression and depreciation of their works) so that they possess the same rights, values, and privileges as men (Bressler, 1994, p. 103). The feminist movement has raised awareness of women’s standing, connection to their surroundings and society, and the degree to which outside factors affect them. These movements oppose the incorrect ideas and behaviors that obstruct women’s advancement in different spheres of life, whether as homemakers or in public life. Feminists believe that there are no distinctions between men and women except in biology. In this regard, feminists reject several views prevalent in most countries to guarantee that this biological difference does not impair women’s ability to achieve a significant position within society. Feminists want to empower women by giving them the ability to share their ideas and experiences and by demonstrating that their importance in the public sphere is equal to that of men.

In *Encyclopedia of Feminism*, American author Lisa Tuttle (1986) asserts that feminist critical theory began by examining old major literary texts through a

modern lens of a female perspective and criticizing sexism in these texts, while also shedding light on women writers and their works to raise awareness of the double standards placed on their texts (p. 184). According to Tuttle (1986), the objectives of feminist criticism are to develop and discover a female tradition of writing, to analyze the symbolic meaning of women's writing to ensure it is not overlooked or neglected by the paternal viewpoint. She continues that the feminist criticism aims to revisit old texts, to examine female writers and their texts from a female point of view. Moreover, feminist theory resists sexism in literary works, and raises awareness of sexual issues of words and expressions (p. 184).

Feminist theory examines women's social roles and experiences to understand the nature of gender inequality. To do this, the theory has multiple methods in a variety of disciplines that provide a deeper understanding of the social construction of gender and sex. Several early versions of feminism have been criticized for focusing solely on white, middle-class, and educated viewpoints without addressing other characteristics, such as ethnicity or culture. In a broader sense, the theoretical side of feminism examines gender inequity through the lens of gender politics, authority relations, and sexuality. In literary criticism, the basis and principles of feminism are used to critique any type of literature. Many contemporary critics analyze or critique literary texts by entering different discourses on elements that shape identity, such as sexual orientation, class, and race. The main purpose of this entry is to use a deeper and more universal method to discover the causes of female subjugation in a deeper and more universal method (Zeitz, 2008, p. 677).

Lois Tyson (2006) mentions that feminist literary theory investigates how literature (and other cultural productions) support or diminish the political, economic, psychological, and social oppression of women (p. 83). Tyson (2006) adds that feminist critical theory involves women's situation in literary texts and how women are depicted in fiction. The feminist criticism also addresses the issue of women's marginalization from mainstream literature due to viewpoints suggesting that women writers are hardly universal (pp. 107-108). The ultimate self-conscious term of feminist literary criticism is the result of centuries of women's writings, women writing about other women's writing, and of women –

and men – writing about women’s bodies, minds, ideas, and arts, according to Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (2007, p. 2).

The Victorian era marked the official emergence of feminism, with women calling for a united movement in the fight for their rights (Rampton, 2015). Many notable female writers, like the Brontë sisters, Jane Austen, and George Eliot, firmly established themselves as competition in the male-dominated domain of writing and challenged the norms of their era. Feminist literary criticism began to take shape with works such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft gaining popularity in the 19th century.

Though the Victorian era was mostly recognized as one of economic wealth, it was also an era of class and gender restrictions. Gender inequality is a main mark of this era despite the advances made toward equality between women and men. According to Crooks and Baur in *Our Sexuality* (2011), the social roles of Victorian citizens were specified by gender. Men and women had extremely different expectations and responsibilities. The ideal woman was expected to be involved in the household and fulfil a variety of significant tasks, the first of which was childbirth (p. 13). Society at that time regarded marriage as the ultimate goal for girls, and from their childhood, they were raised to take care of the male family members, whether father, young brother, or older brother (Vicinus, 1972, p. ix).

With the emergence of industrialization, workplaces shifted from homes (e.g., agriculture houses) to factories. Thus, the word “house” became more narrowly defined as “woman’s natural and appropriate place: she belonged in the house because biology put her there” (Dickerson, 2016, p. xiii). Because women were expected to remain inside the confines of the family and the home, a stereotype of the ideal woman developed for Victorian women, who were expected to behave appropriately for their gender roles. Lyn Pykett provides an exhaustive list of proper feminine representations in her book, *The Improper Feminine* (2016): “the domestic ideal; the madonna; the keeper of the domestic temple; asexuality; passionlessness; innocence; self-abnegation; commitment to duty; self-sacrifice; lack of legal identity; dependence; slave; victim” (p. 16). With these expectations, the term “angel in the house” was popularized. This ideology seems to have

originated in the Middle Ages; “mankind’s great teacher of purity was the Virgin Mother”, as Gilbert and Gubar (1979) state. The Virgin Mother was a figure that inspired male authors to imagine women as angelic, perfect, pure, peaceful, giving, and kind. Famous male authors, such as Dante, Milton, and Goethe, portrayed their heroines as symbols of eternal purity, thereby creating a means to measure the “purity” of a woman, and this measurement was used by the patriarchal society during the Victorian era (p. 20).

Next, “angel in the house” was used as a coded reference to the usual domestic ideology to which Victorian society limited itself and through which it portrayed the goodness of women. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) note, “the eternal type of feminine purity was represented not by a Madonna in Heaven but by an angel in the house” (p. 20). In other words, the idea affirms the core principle that women belong in the home, where they are supposed to have a civilized effect on men. As a result, every additional activity that women contemplate beyond the safe walls of the house becomes nearly blasphemous and damaging to society’s positive development. If society is based on the family, which is dependent on a certain role for women, changing that position jeopardizes the whole structure of society.

The “Angel in the House” poem by Coventry Patmore was the source of this term. In his poem, Patmore underlines that a woman’s main purpose in life is to satisfy a man, and he claims that she receives pleasure from fulfilling this role, therefore, the poem gained widespread popularity in Victorian culture. Virginia Woolf defines the ideal woman as one who is incapable of transcending domesticity, who is committed only to her family, and who has been purified of sexual consciousness (Cooper, 2001, p. 10). Woolf (1967) states the following:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draft, she sat in it—in short, she was so constituted that she never had a mind of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it--- she was pure. Her purity was supposed to be her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace (p. 141).

As the concepts of pure and angelic women became well-known, and due to the critical role of female sexuality in Victorian culture, another category of

woman emerged: the fallen (Watt, 1984, p. 3). The phrase “fallen woman” applies to women who did not correspond to the mentioned traits of the ideal woman. Margaret Reynolds (2016) describes this fallenness as “the orphaned seamstress who is seduced by a handsome aristocrat; the bored married woman who commits adultery; the girl who is abducted and raped in a brothel; the woman who has a secret baby by the man she loved” (p. 10). Furthermore, Anderson (1993) states that the fallen woman term means “a range of feminine identities: prostitutes, unmarried women who engaged in sexual relations with men, victims of seduction, adulteresses, as well as variously delinquent lower-class women” (p. 2). Although the majority of women referred to as “fallen” were prostitutes, the word involves not just women who had strayed from sexuality, but also “female thieves, tramps, alcoholics, and those who were described as feeble-minded” (Mumm, 1996, p. 527).

There was no talk of the “fallen man” since the Victorian era maintained distinct norms for men and women. Men who engaged in sexual relations outside of marriage were widely tolerated, whereas women faced severe criticism from many Victorians. There was no greater sin for a woman than to lose her purity. She was socially isolated then. On the contrary, when men committed a sin, they were more forgivable. As a result, such women were considered fallen, while men were not.

The majority of women labelled “fallen” were from the lower class. Working-class women could not become as pure as middle-class women. Even while many people of from the working class agreed with the notion of “ideal”, they were unable to adjust to becoming an ideal woman due to financial and societal limitations. They lived in cramped homes, were forced to work early hours, and observed people’s lives being ruined by poverty, drunkenness, and prostitution (Vicinus, 1972, p. xii-xiii). As their respectability vanished, they eventually resorted to the streets to resume their lives. In the following excerpt, Mumm (1996) defines the lifecycle of fallen women:

The typical life-cycle of a ‘fallen’ servant, was for a young girl, often from a disrupted family background, to be employed in domestic service from early to mid-adolescence; to fall through a sexual relationship with someone of roughly the same social class; to lose her

place as a result; and be forced onto the streets through her lack of respectability (and resulting lack of references). These girls were so young that it is surprising that any stayed out of trouble. One girl, the daughter of an alcoholic, had been in service since her twelfth birthday. By seventeen she was in the penitentiary. Others had been general servants since the age of ten (p. 533).

A fallen woman, according to Victorian culture, was contagious, and she was seen as a threat to morals. Such women were alienated from their communities as disgraces and stigmatized by “decent” society because of their tragic fates. They were easily eliminated from the nomination of future brides. Although Victorians considered fallen women a source of shame and lacking in purity, they were, in fact, victims of power and society themselves (Barnhill, 2005, pp. 7-8). As sexual acts were limited for married women, pregnancy was considered evidence of sexual crime which severely harmed the prospect of these women. There were certain institutions available to these women, one of which was the Foundling Hospital, to which single mothers appealed to have their infants admitted, intending for their children to have a bright future and a suitable working life. Workhouses were another option for women and children, but they implied a life of dire poverty. Many novels in the 19th century, such as Gaskell’s *Ruth* (1853), Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1837) and Wood’s *East Lynne* (1861), included the character of a fallen woman.

Marriage was considered a holy institution by the Victorians due to their religious beliefs, the ideal wife ought to be an angel in the house. The institution of marriage was structured by rules governing in favor of “the stronger gender”, who was seen as the representative of God. The 19th-century society was patriarchal, with the middle and upper classes being the most conservative (Wasson, 2016, 126). Marriage was a union in which several matters were discussed: power and authority distribution, exploitation of resources, division of labor, and expression of ideas (Abrams, 2005, 71). Women were indoctrinated into believing they were inferior to men, and this sense of dependency made most women marry for economic reasons. Many women expressed anxiety over the idea of marriage since marriage was a requirement of many women’s Christian beliefs at the time. Harriet Beecher Stowe expresses this best. As Steven Mintz (1983) writes, “she (Harriet) said that she would remain a useless sinner unless she found that divine love that

‘could supply the loss of all earthly love’” (p. 131). Marriage was seen as a religious act distinct from sexual affections. Mintz (1983) mentions this idea, stating, “we might better recognize it as an intellectual construct, a fiction, which served to counteract the most troubling aspects of the marital relationship and to redirect human emotions in a pure and moral direction” (p. 135). Victorians exalted love to a form of worship and a spiritual interaction to distance it from the actions that the devout Victorian Christians despised and dreaded, such as fornication and lust.

Victorians had multiple motives for marriage. The first was socioeconomic: “a contract between two families” (Stone, 1991, p. 182), which meant to maintain or expand riches. Second, marriage might have romantic reasons. In that case, the future spouse’s moral qualities were decisive. This form of marriage is clearly illustrated in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) as Jane possesses ideal feminine features (mixed with her unique courage and sense of independence) that captured the attention of a Victorian gentleman. The most reprobated motive (in both society and literature) was the sexual one. Women were warned against men’s sexual desires as a reason for marriage because it might be mistaken for romance (Stone, p. 190). There was a possibility of romantic love, which merged with the socioeconomic reason, however, parents of couples had authority over their sons and daughters, especially in rich families, as Stone (1991) explains, “the richer and more well-born the family, the greater is the power likely to be exercised” (p. 182). This was allegedly prompted by the need to manage and increase property. A poor choice in the marriage market would ruin the endeavors of many generations. Victorian parents attempted to maintain their veto power in the marriage market. Numerous historians assert that the veto served as a tool to regulate and prevent inappropriate marriage, which was seen as a cause of societal distress. In the upper classes, power and wealth were such significant factors in marriage that they could not be separated from other considerations. Thus, weddings were often a combination of emotions and “old-fashioned economic horse trading” (Stone, p. 202). Parents attempted to provide their children with freedom of choice without jeopardizing their social standing. Meetings of young people within the same social class were arranged to introduce them to potential partners.

Marriages in the 19th century were typically arranged by the family's mother as the marriage institution became increasingly valuable for upper-class families. It was crucial for mothers to make excellent matches, facilitating pleasant meetings between daughters and possible suitors, since the effect of the marriage bond would last for generations. This practice is highlighted in George Moore's *A Mummer's Wife* (1885): Ralph marries Kate in an agreement between the mothers of the couple. Generally, potential grooms were not the ones "up for sale" (Perkin, 1988, p.65), but potential brides were displayed for suitable matches. However, women were not completely powerless or idle in these situations. While their decisions were often based on quite practical considerations, women could pick who they wedded and occasionally chose partners for "noble or romantic" motives. Mothers sought to make marriages that benefited the family's social position and fortunes while still considering the interests of their daughters, commonly attempting to "protect their daughters" (Perkin, p. 65) from social climbers and others with less than high ideals.

One of the most significant challenges Victorian women faced when marrying was experimenting with conservative and popular views about their sexuality. According to Christian and Victorian beliefs, women were meant to be innocent creatures who engaged in sexual activity solely to fulfil their roles as wives and mothers. In 1875, a physician called William Acton stated the ideal woman, in addition to being "kind, considerate, self-sacrificing, and sensible", was also "utterly ignorant of and averse to any sensual indulgence" (qtd. In Dillman, 1998, p. 129). These characteristics are heavily present in literary texts from male authors who attempt to draw the image of "the angel in the house". Amelia Sedley of *Vanity Fair* (1848) is one of these women. Due to the fact that women were expected to be like angels, they were not necessarily aware of what would occur on the wedding night. Respectable females were often raised in utter ignorance of life's reality or with just enough knowledge to fear pregnancy. William Acton also went on and said, "I am ready to maintain that there are many females who never feel any sexual excitement whatever... Love of home, of children, and of domestic duties are the only passions they feel" (qtd. In Malone, 1988, p. 176). This statement clearly demonstrates how many Victorians believed that women had no

lust for sex except to become pregnant and produce children. However, this idea was obviously unrealistic since many female writings in the Victorian era proved the opposite. Victorians tried multiple methods to conceal the truth of this issue. Perkin (1988) describes the efforts created to keep sexual issues hidden and secretive: “Sex was civilized by ignoring it; features of the strategy were to ban sex from conversation, to hide it in dark bedrooms, to conceal the shape of women’s bodies, to censor sex in books” (p. 276). As a result of this suppression of sex-related discussion, many young ladies, as previously noted, were unaware of what occurred in the marital bedroom prior to marriage.

Legally, a wife was not regarded as a separate individual. The husband assumed responsibility for all her actions. A married woman’s position was protected and governed by her husband. Everything she had or inherited before the marriage, including money in hand, money in the bank, jewellery, home items, and clothing, belonged entirely to the husband. Regardless of whether the couple lived together, the husband could grant and allot these possessions anytime he pleased. Additionally, the husband might retain the funds earned by his wife (Smith, 1856, p. 4). Thus, widows and spinsters took far better care of their possessions than married women did (Morris, 2005, p. 237). In terms of child custody, the mother did not remain responsible. By law, the father was in charge of and accountable for the children. If the husband had a sound mind, the wife possessed no rights over the children, with the exception of certain restricted rights over babies, and the husband was authorized to take them from their mother (Smith, p. 5). A married lady was compelled to reside in the locations determined by her husband. She lacked the authority to enter a contract or choose how her possessions would be allocated upon her death, according to Sally Mitchell (2009, p. 104).

Since marriage was considered the cornerstone of women’s life, education was not as widespread for girls as it was for boys. Education in the Victorian era varied according to the children’s sexes and parents’ economic conditions, social levels, and religion (Mitchell, p. 169). It was believed that girls did not need to participate in public life. Instead, they should finish their careers at home, developing into married women like their mothers. Working-class girls started their education at home by caring for infants, assisting their mothers, or doing

needlework as a means of supporting their family economy. Even for parents with higher expectations, women's education was a secondary concern. It was believed that females needed more protection morally and socially than males. Parents did not want their girls to attend schools that were distant from home or that were large. There were small private schools located near their homes where women were taught (Mitchell, pp. 181-183). Education meant power for the middle-class. They believed, however, that power and knowledge should remain mainly in the hands of men. Many believed that women did not need to attend schools. Certain Victorians felt that education would exclude women from fulfilling household duties. On the other side, a rising number of people, both men and women, believed that the education acquired by females from wealthy families was insufficient, posing a challenge for their future spouses and families (Morgan, 2007, p. 36).

Women were educated on proper manners and elegance to demonstrate these qualities to their prospective spouses. Women possessed skills and were taught to play musical instruments and sing; they also received instruction in sewing and craft work. A few female individuals were encouraged to engage in language acquisition and reading, but only to a limited degree. Jeremy Paxman (1999) states the following:

Many magazines or periodicals especially alerted women against being too smart in the company of men. Victorian men despised intelligent, clever and opinionated women; it would not be to her benefit appearing this way. Victorian women not only had been alerted against being and looking smart; but at the same time, they were considered not to be capable of learning and studying, the term 'educated women' was an oxymoron (p. 222).

Furthermore, women were popularly thought to have smaller brains than men, and thus less intellectual ability (Mosedale, 1978). Additionally, raising children and giving birth were seen as meaningless actions that did not need mental functioning. Moreover, when women were given the option to obtain an education, they opted for courses in literature, language, art, and music since women were believed to be incapable of comprehending scientific disciplines such as mathematics (p. 9).

The founding of Queen's College in 1848 was a pivotal event for women since it transformed women's lives and opened opportunities for women to pursue careers that had previously been closed to them. As stated, Victorian society believed that providing women with opportunities to work outside the home, whether married or unmarried, in factories or elsewhere, transformed women into unprepared housewives and mothers by diverting them from domestic training or commitment to housekeeping, thus belittling the family (Thompson, 1988, p. 87). With time, it became much simpler for women to obtain occupations that matched their abilities and the information previously taught in schools and universities. Victorian women discovered themselves in nursing and teaching, and for a while, women worked as librarians in quickly developing public libraries and as shop clerks in newly formed department shops. A significant step forward was the establishment of female clerks as public officials in 1870, when the authority assumed control of electric telegraphs; this change demonstrated what a department expected from women: couched and sufficient service.

The belief that women should not be permitted to attend college or enter professions appeared to have remained unchanged for most women until the 1890s. Middle-class and upper-middle-class households continued to educate their daughters, whether via private schools or governesses to teach them at home. The goal of education was to send their daughters to private schools with syllabi concerned with educating them on how to live domestically as spouses and mothers (Watts, 2008, pp. 185-186). However, the primary reason to send a girl to a school was to provide her with a little achievement to aid in finding a husband as quickly as possible after graduation (Grylls, 1949, p. 256) Thus, marriage remained the primary objective of the majority of women's life.

Despite advancements in women's rights (e.g., education, property ownership, and divorce), Victorian men desired to see females confined to the home rather than seeking jobs outside of it. Victorian low-class women had limited alternatives if they were unable to partner with a man. They may work as a governess, as a married man's mistress, or as a spinster who relied on family or donators for support (Jackson, 1996, p. 33). Conversely, if middle- and upper-class women sought activities outside the home sphere, they faced harsh treatment and

were seen as unfeminine by the males in their environment. Middle- and upper-class women were socialized to feel that work devalued their femininity and social position (Rose, 2003, p. 187). Male members of middle- and upper-class households discouraged their wives and daughters from seeking jobs, which signalled that the family was in financial distress. According to Elizabeth Langland (1992), the Victorian husband relied on his wife to undertake the ideological task of class management and exhibit signs of the family's position (p. 291). The woman's role was to publicize the family's riches and to guarantee that the house maintained class standards. As a result, society saw female work as an embarrassment to the family, as it interfered with a woman's obligation to demonstrate the family's social standing.

Regarding employment, women faced discrimination in payments and wages. In *Daily Life in Victorian England* (1996), Sally Mitchell asserts that there was a widespread misconception that Victorian women did not work. With the exception of upper-class women who lived in luxury, a multitude of women worked in a variety of occupations (p. 45). Claudia Nelson (2007) says, "according to 1851 census, half of the six million adult women in England, Wales, and Scotland worked for pay, and two million were self-supporting" (p.21). Among these occupations, the most popular was domestic service, followed by clerical and shop employment (Mitchell, 1996, p. 46). However, pay disparity occurred between the sexes. Although men and women often worked in similar positions, women were unable to earn the same wage as men who "retained the lion's share of home resources", states Shani D'Cruze (2004, p.259). Inequality between the sexes was also evident in their roles. In general, women from the lower classes worked as seamstresses, washer women, straw plaiters, household maids, and industrial employees, among other jobs, and they worked because of need.

Being a governess was one of Victorian women's main jobs. Victorians were certain that women had an innate maternal instinct. Therefore, a career like a governess was considered an ordinary development of the heavenly nature that women were granted with. The role of governess was also popularized in conduct books such as *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), and *Vanity Fair* (1848). Heather Julien (2007) asserts that the teaching techniques used by

women were markedly different than those used by men. Women's teaching applied whatever was necessary to their task, which is why the rate of female achievement in this field was consistently higher than the rate of male achievement since it is 'instinctive'. It was not work in the traditional sense, but rather a realized embodiment of ideal motherhood (p. 120). However, these jobs earned a poor reputation within society, owing to the widespread belief that teaching implied what females were born to do. Despite this, teaching was believed to be the only feasible career option for women at the time. However, not all women desired to be governesses. Becoming a governess was the only viable option for women who came from poor families or were orphans (Peterson, 1989, p. 6).

To an extent, the job of governess seems a grey area in the minds of Victorian society. Julien (2007) asserts that governesses were both workers disguised as women and women disguised as workers. Most of these women were from struggling families and were of lower social status. Being employed in these types of positions, particularly the ability to work in higher class homes, almost certainly benefited them in terms of social status advancement. The predominating class association generated a social anomaly, creating an atmosphere of scepticism or cynicism, which often manifested itself in total disregard toward the governess (Julien, 2007, p. 123). As a result, those women engaged as governesses were often regarded as insignificant in comparison to the other members of the housekeeping staff, despite the governess being responsible for educating the children of these upper-class houses.

Regarded as a one of the main pillars in feminist criticism, *The Second Sex* (1956), written by the French author and prominent feminist figure, Simone de Beauvoir, serves as a guiding tool to understand, examine, and investigate female problems and their roots in various realms and institutions mentioned in the previous part. In *The Second Sex* (1956), Beauvoir investigates how women's situation has evolved through time, examining the connection between men and women. Ann Curthoys (2000) states that the book features "analysis on women's status as secondary, the Other, the inessential, the less than human". Curthoys adds that the book had a key impact on some of the most important feminists, including

Kate Millet, Betty Freidan, and Shulamith Firestone. *The Second Sex* asserts that “there is a universal sexual asymmetry between women and men” (pp. 4-15).

As a socialist feminist, Beauvoir sought to challenge the egalitarian politics, which seemed to support middle- and high-class women while ignoring the demands of working class and underprivileged women. Unlike equality feminists, socialist feminists exploit capitalism to challenge the patriarchal society. For Beauvoir, egalitarian feminists do not dare to challenge capitalism as a form of oppression. Instead, they disregard the concept of women being equal in a capitalist environment, focus on personal autonomy, and make no serious move to reform capitalism’s structure (cited in Hartmann, 1981).

Beauvoir builds her argument in *The Second Sex* on three foundations. She uses existentialism as an ideology that emphasizes one’s own freedom, personal choice, and experience as a human. Beauvoir believes that humans are basically free, and their freedom defines their life. Calling this state transcendence (p. 27), she asserts that for females, it is almost impossible to transcend. Whether they fight their suppression or not, females remain in immanence since they reside in the category of the Other (p. 27). She also employs psychoanalysis to examine the subconscious reasons for human behavior and uses it as a basis for feminist understanding of sexual differences and gender formation in patriarchal society (Moi, 1994, pp. 33-34). Furthermore, Beauvoir’s historical materialism highlights the significance of social conditions, economic status, and class, particularly for women. She explains how in history, women have been reduced to economic and social servitude, and they are completely dependent on men to provide their needs. Since men had more power over the economy, politics, and society, they had a more substantial effect on the development of culture as well as on the development of history.

The first section of the book discusses the biology of men and women as their biological distinctions were used to demonstrate their differences. Men attempted to rationalize women’s inequalities by alluding to their biology, De Beauvoir claims. Historically, the basis of prejudice was built on myths and lacked scientific evidence. Additionally, for her, distinguishing women from men is difficult. A

perfectly obvious distinction cannot be drawn solely on the existence of two kinds (male and female) based on physical appearances. Furthermore, distinctions do not imply the presence of passivity and activity. To demonstrate, women cannot be considered passive since the embryo is developed by sperm but the egg is also a living entity. Beauvoir says, “women and men are physically distinct in terms of height, weight, and the form of their skeletons”, but although their tissues are connected differently or they have different amounts of hemoglobin or hormones, these features do not support women’s passivity (pp. 1-27). For instance, Victorians believed that biology was behind women’s inferiority. Backed by Darwin’s discoveries and observations, this belief became firmer. Darwin claimed that females are naturally submissive and males are naturally dominant, thus females are passive creatures who lack the ability to compete with men in the public domain (Richardson, 2014). Beauvoir states that male bodies are deemed normal, but female bodies are considered deviant and are defined by their capacity to reproduce. Beauvoir dismisses the patriarchy’s sexual preconceptions of women, which assert that the female body validates the roles of women.

After biology, Beauvoir cites instances of sexism and masculine hegemony in mythology, history, and philosophy to investigate the roots of women’s subordination. For instance, Aristotle maintains that women, compared to males, have less intellectual ability; hence, Aristotle views women’s subordinate status to men as natural (p. 126). In addition, she emphasizes that women are represented in mythology as demons and are seen as inefficient beings; consequently, all women are wicked, and women can only cause men sorrow (p. 126). Clearly, mythology has several sexist themes that mirror the hegemonic viewpoint. Beauvoir illustrates that in a male-dominated society, men’s desires, ideas, and actions are more significant and acceptable than women’s since man is indisputably superior.

Beauvoir argues that men and women were equal in pre-historic periods. Men hunted and fished, while women had with household tasks, such as tending to the land or making pottery. Consequently, they played a significant economic role. However, with the discovery of copper, iron, bronze, and tin, males assumed a greater role since these new discoveries required “intense work”, which women were considered incapable of doing. They also brought about the emergence of

private property, resulting in not just master-slave relationships, but also the slavery of women by males in patriarchal households. Males' achievements were more valued than women's domestic labor because men saw themselves as discoverers, producers, creators, and dominators. They thought themselves to be more powerful than nature and hence believed they could achieve anything on their own (pp. 60-63).

The subordination of women was not only due to the rise of private property (p. 63). Beauvoir refers to Friedrich Engels, who stated women, just as land and slaves, were owned since domestic labor became of a limited importance following the discovery of metals. Women lacked the bodily power necessary to create bronze or iron instruments; thus, they were "defeated". Beauvoir mentions that despite Engels providing a positive step toward understanding this transition of women's situation, he neglects how this transition occurred and offers no explanation for the real reason behind men's large interest in ownership (represented in private property). Beauvoir argues that this idea lacks meaning unless one understands the manner of this being (man). Beauvoir asserts that, internally, man tends to affirm his independent existence (p. 64). Furthermore, Beauvoir states that, despite its existence, this tendency was not expressed before the emergence of private property due to a lack of proper tools. The discovery of metal instruments allowed man to discover himself as he was feeling lost between nature and clan. With his discovery of bronze and iron, man dared to challenge nature as his sense of independence began to increase, which led him to impose control over the land. Beauvoir admits that the physical build of women contributed to their subordination, but she argues that the real reason behind their exploitation was man's ambition (p. 70). Since men were more ambitious due to their desire of expansion, they considered women as a burden. Thus, this relationship between men and women cannot be reduced to a mere master-slave dynamic. A slave is capable of revolting against his master while women could not. Women lacked the desire to revolt against men since they shared a community. Women remained important to society due to their production and reproduction. A slave can eliminate slavery, but a woman cannot eliminate her sex; rather, she asks for sexual discrimination to be abolished (p. 80).

Prior to her psychoanalysis approach to the matter of the male-female connection, Beauvoir wonders why women were so unconcerned with male supremacy and from where did their submission originate. No subject would gladly agree to be the object or the inessential. She continues in claiming that “it is not the Other who, in defining himself as the Other, establishes the One” (p. 17), rather, she explains that the One, in defining himself as the One, poses the Other to the category of Otherness. As a result, the Other automatically becomes submissive and accepts this alienation if he/she does not reclaim the status of being the One. (p. 17). Beauvoir tries to answer these questions by stating that there is a basic unity between men and women as both are necessary to each other: the Other is necessary to the One, making a reference to G.W.F. Hegel’s dialect.

Beauvoir believes that a dialectic between man and woman exists in which the male is represented as Self and the woman as the Other. The Other is inferior, defined as the alien, the unusual, and the obscure. The woman has assumed this role of the Other, and the man has assumed the role of Self and superiority. To G.W.F. Hegel, the Self typically confronts and characterizes itself in opposition to the Other, implying the Self can only express itself in opposition to what it is not: the Other (Gines, 2014). This dialectic is called Hegel’s master-slave dialectic; the Self functions as the master of the Other (the slave). Beauvoir extends this dialectic to men and women. In her dialectic, the man ought to be the master, while the woman is the slave. Though she is not recognized as a slave by a man, a woman is necessary to the man similar to the necessity of a slave in the master-slave dialectic. Beauvoir argues that there is an abstract equality between males and females in a family (p. 19). Her idea is that in addition to her need for a guardian, a woman’s equality is only related to her home or family. Hegel (1967) argues that the physical differences between males and females are a basis for their determined roles in society. He asserts that it is difficult for women to endure life outside the realm of the house, and even if they do so, they cannot reach the “ideal” (p. 166).

Throughout medieval and nearing 19th-century Europe, women enjoyed dignity and respect if they were devout Christians. However, women did not have high standing in religious ceremonies. Although both males and females had to be faithful to each other in marriages during those times, males had complete

authority over their wives (Beauvoir, 1956, p. 109). During the 17th century, women took an interest in literature and arts. Furthermore, salons were popular among the high classes. In the 18th century, husbands of the growing middle-class prioritized their wives' morals as upper-middle-class women lived lives filled with vanity. Many women enjoyed reading philosophy and took interest in sciences, like chemistry and physics. Equal rights for men and women were finally established by the Socialist Congress in 1879 despite its lack of a feminist intent, and the women's right to vote was first proposed in 1901 (p. 138).

For women in recent history, Beauvoir is fully aware that women have been denied a voice due to their constant guardianship by males. While it is true that women from a better economic level might enjoy their independence, working-class women faced a considerably more difficult situation. They were completely enslaved. As a result, women were incapable of changing their situations (p. 145). Beauvoir asserts, "It is not the inferiority of women that has caused their historical insignificance, it is their historical insignificance that has doomed them to inferiority" (p. 148).

The Second Sex's most famous argument is the following statement: "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". This statement illustrates the difference between sex and gender, as well as the biological distinction between man and woman (p. 273). Beauvoir believes that social and cultural dimensions are what create and shape women into a patriarchal society as subjugated and secondary beings. Society and social pressures alienate the female and dictate how and what a woman should be. She expands on her argument by stating that men oppress women both at home and through social systems. For her, almost all aspects of social systems serve to reaffirm this tyranny through the hierarchy of sexes (p. 292). According to Beauvoir, the typically male-dominated family is one of cultural elements that reinforce the idea of males' supremacy and dominance. Beauvoir acknowledges men and women have physiological and biological distinctions, but she regularly emphasizes women are categorized as the second sex and the Other (Moi, 1994, p. 24).

Butler (2007) states that, for Beauvoir, gender must be regarded as capable of adopting or realizing possibilities, perceiving the body, and culturally shaping it. Gender is not a matter of attaining a static ontological state from which one could be born a woman, but of engaging in an active process of capturing, interpreting, and reinterpreting cultural possibilities. For Beauvoir, the word “become” entails a resultant complexity. Gender is not a purely cultural construct. While identity is imposed on individuals, gender is a self-constructive system. Gender is often conceived in more present times as a weakly defined, personified framework of patriarchal or phallogocentric terminology that predates and determines the subject (p. 36).

According to Beauvoir, women have been seen only through men’s eyes: Without men, women lack identity; their whole existence is dependent on men (p. 26). When males live freely without women, women do not have the same possibility for freedom; hence, men are the fundamental component of humankind, while women are men’s affiliations (p. 26). For instance, an unmarried woman is referred to as Miss, whereas a married woman is referred to as Missus and has her husband’s surname. Beauvoir suggests that women’s subordinate roles are a result of patriarchal practices. She challenges these androcentric views and seeks to increase female consciousness to achieve liberation.

Beauvoir also compares men and women, highlighting how they are held to a different standard in their family and communities. Boys and girls respond differently to their moms’ separation. Boys are no longer dependent on their mothers’ milk and must take the initiative to grow into adults. Girls are always surrounded by their parents. They are made to wear beautiful skirts or dresses and are permitted to cry and act capriciously. In contrast, boys are denied the right to cry because men cannot cry, and they should not anticipate being kissed. Additionally, boys are forced away from women to become men (pp. 304-305).

Older females ought to possess a motherly role model. They assist their mothers with household chores. However, children are unaware of the impact these factors will have on them as they mature. Even as youngsters, they develop into “little women”. They take pleasure in caring for their younger siblings and do so

with pride. Because their mothers are usually present, they are constantly mindful about their surroundings. Brothers are not as involved as sisters are. They are, nonetheless, inquisitive about their fathers' lives. Male children's experience is not comparable to females' situations since fathers are not always present. They have separate lifestyles in which their spouses are not permitted to interfere. Even as children, females are exposed to tales such as Cinderella or Rapunzel in which the male protagonist must abandon or rescue the girl, as if girls have to wait for someone to rescue them. This notion is instilled in girls from their earliest years. However, as they grow older, they understand that there is a vast world beyond domesticity. They used to believe that their houses were the whole world and that their mothers were in charge, but they realize that this is not the truth. They recognize that the world is men's territory. Men are the world's dominators (pp. 321-346).

Boys remain active throughout their maturation, but young girls remain passive. They need safety and are on the lookout for a man who can fulfil their needs. They want a man who will make them feel the same sense of security that they had in their fathers (pp. 367-368). Socially, men are the ones who create and join various types of communities. They are socially connected and have an active life, while women are not viewed as similarly active participants. They mostly interact with their female counterparts and are seldom seen in public. Additionally, women are supposed to be seductive objects and dress in ways that entice their husbands even if their husbands do not require such actions (pp. 588-590). According to Beauvoir, when women age, they tend to give up their fight. When their elder spouses die, they start enjoying their lives, which provides an opportunity for vengeance. Men, however, are more "upset" than women when their spouses die as they "benefit" more from marriages (p. 662). Beauvoir asserts the following:

...marriage is today a surviving relic of dead ways of life, and situation of the wife is more ungrateful than formerly, because she still has the same duties but they no longer confer the same rights, privileges and honors. Man marries today to obtain an anchorage in immanence, but not to be himself confined therein; he wants to have hearth and home while being free to escape therefrom (p. 442).

To Beauvoir, a woman struggles throughout her life with a variety of domestic tasks (e.g., cooking, sweeping, washing, minding her children) and devotes her whole life to nourishing her husband and children. Consequently, a woman's domestic employment provides her with little autonomy. Beauvoir notably argues in *The Second Sex* that domestic labor is a type of oppression and exploitation. She asserts that the responsibility to perform or manage home duties drives women into a state of perpetual activity that achieves nothing. Domestic work only reinforces the current status quo of female's immanence. Men, in contrast, have the freedom to move and develop as individuals.

Beauvoir criticized depriving women of economic independence as a result of marriage and motherhood. She claimed that since parents believe men are superior to women and women's capabilities are restricted, they raise their daughters solely for marriage rather than developing their own personal lives. Therefore, women have historically fallen behind men in economic independence, and they only had the opportunity to satisfy and serve men. Beauvoir states the following:

The privileged place held by men in economic life, their social usefulness, the prestige of marriage, the value of masculine backing, all this makes women wish ardently to please men. Women are still, for the most part, in a state of subjection. It follows that woman sees herself and makes her choices not in accordance with her true nature in itself, but as man defines her. So, we must first go on to describe for what-in-men's-eyes-she-seems-to-be is one of the necessary factors in her real situation (pp. 127-128).

As men became used to agriculture, they were able to reflect in the way that shaped the world, and they became more self-aware. They lived in the same place they possessed. Women had nothing since males were the makers and owners of property, land, etc. As a result, women could not exist on their own. Their children were the property of their fathers, so their lives and deaths were in the hands of their fathers. In marriage, women's authority figures were their husbands. (pp. 74-93).

Motherhood has often been used as a basis for denial of women's rights and equality, as well as for discrimination against women. Beauvoir makes this

argument: “It is fraudulent to maintain that through maternity woman becomes the actual equal of man” (p. 503). Beauvoir thinks that motherhood was the key aspect that defined women as Others and connected them to immanence. She argues that women are socially conditioned to consider parenting as central to their identity and fulfilment.

According to *The Second Sex*, both men and women must alter their hostility. Whether mutual or not, both sides are trusted to achieve their necessary physical lives as intellectual and educated beings. Men should abandon their desire to embrace their inconsistencies to eliminate the need for a reflection of a feminine element. In exchange, women must abandon their preference for the protection afforded by an alleged object’s position. In other words, men and women alike should abstain from utilizing other sexes to disguise their contingent identities (Vintges, 1996, p. 145).

To summarize, this chapter discussed the origins of the theory of feminism, as well as its definitions, aims, and development. In addition, the chapter offered insights into prominent feminist thinkers, authors, and figures who led the masses toward the awareness of women’s situation and how they reacted to the constraints created by the patriarchal systems that have taken advantage of women. The discussion addressed the theories regarding womanhood in Victorian England and explains how terms like “fallen woman” and “angel in the house” made a critical impact on how society and gender were constructed. Issues such as marriage, education, and employment were also identified to construct a complete idea regarding women’s situation at that time. As a basis for analysis in the upcoming chapters, this chapter discussed Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, which explains how women have been the Other throughout history, while men have always been the One, as well as how the woman is “the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential” (p. 16). Beauvoir emphasizes women’s difficulty in expressing themselves as they become “alienated” and marginalized (p. 28). In her criticism of women’s subordination, Beauvoir bases her arguments in existentialism, stressing the individual’s freedom and awareness of his/her choice, which defines his/her life. Represented by the characteristics and concepts mentioned in the historical part of this chapter, the two female characters in two

novels will be analyzed through the lens of *The Second Sex* by utilizing Beauvoir's theories of gender to construct a thorough comparison. Finally, since social mobility and social class are main themes in the selected novels, *The Second Sex* offers a suitable fundamental ground for analysis as it associates social status with women's subordination.



SECOND CHAPTER

2. WILLIAM M. THACKERAY'S PORTRAYAL OF AMBIVALENT FEMALE AGENCY IN *VANITY FAIR*

William M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (1848) is a picaresque novel illustrating the unpredictable nature of the narrative's serial events and is narrated by Thackeray himself. As a picaresque novel, which describes the adventures of a roguish, low-class individual as he/she moves from one place and social environment to another using his/her wits and tricks to survive, *Vanity Fair* (1848) lacks a main plot and focuses on the actions of the characters rather than their development. The novel follows the lives of two women: Rebecca (Becky) Sharp, a smart, determined young lady of a penniless artist and a French "opera-girl", and her friend Amelia (Emmy) Sedley, a warm-hearted young lady of an upper-middle-class family. Set in the background of the Napoleonic Wars, *Vanity Fair* recounts the girls' financial, marital, and familial misadventures. Becky is raised by her father who trusted his daughter to Miss Pinkerton's school of girls before his death. The polar opposite of Emmy, Becky is manipulative, smart, and heartless, while Emmy, who is first described as the novel's protagonist, is passive, nice, and charming. Becky, who is forced to become a governess by circumstance, marries Rawdon Crawley, the son of her hirer, Sir Pitt. Rawdon is a higher-class army officer who ends up with little to no money. Emmy marries George Osborne, also an army man, who is disinherited by his judgmental father. Critics of that time discussed *Vanity Fair*'s unempathetic vision of society, while later ones have focused on the novel's portrayal of women's commodification in a capitalist world.

Despite the fact that Thackeray focuses on Amelia Sedley at the beginning of his novel, thus implying she is the heroine, Rebecca Sharp is the main protagonist in the novel. Certain aspects of Becky's situation resemble those of Jane Eyre's life, according to some critics. Both are orphans, but they are also powerful women

whose emergence may be seen as a danger by society. Their behavior, however, is polar opposite (Kaye, 1995, p. 727). Becky is portrayed as a *Femme fatale*, someone who can captivate men with a single look to the point that they “proposed something like a marriage” (Thackeray 12).

There are numerous unanswered questions involving this woman, and Thackeray’s account of the events allows for several interpretations. Her willingness to take risks and indulge in gambling, her military personality, and her determination to succeed in attaining social status must have been viewed as inappropriate, particularly because she possesses no masculine characteristics in her physical appearance. Her actions are presented as stolen qualities from men (Pietka, p. 239), which is clear in this excerpt:

She had never mingled in the society of women: her father, reprobate as he was, was a man of talent; his conversation was a thousand times more agreeable to her than the talk of such of her own sex as she now encountered. Schoolmistress, the foolish good-humour of her sister, the silly chat and scandal of the elder girls, and the frigid correctness of the governesses equally annoyed her; and she had no soft maternal heart (p. 26).

In the above paragraph, Thackeray refers to the process of gender-making. As stated in the previous chapter, according to Beauvoir, gender is a result of multiple variables rather than a biological feat. Thackeray mentions that, since her childhood, Rebecca is not used to mixing with fellow girls since she lost her mother at an early age. Mothers during her era served as role models for their daughters. Daughters were supposed to follow their mothers and embody the role of ideal womanhood to be accepted in society. With no mother, Rebecca feels attached to her father and prefers his conversations more than those of her own sex. Thackeray seems to support the idea having a mother is necessary for the growth of a young lady to be “ideal”. However, he denies the traditional notion of maternal instinct since “maternal heart” for him is cultivated by the norms of family and society. Similarly, he also ridicules the stereotypical feminine society of his time, which he thought was mainly concerned with gossip, envy, and foolishness. One can only speculate how Becky’s character would be in the presence of a mother in a wealthy environment. Most certainly, she would not be the same brave and independent Becky Sharp.

After her father passes away, Becky joins Miss Pinkerton's school. There, Becky notices the standards set in her society that gave higher classes different types of treatment. She is not treated equally to other girls since she was poor and did not have a rich father like the others. This treatment leads her to have a revolutionary spirit against any authority as she is described as a snake by her teachers, who represent the patriarchal authority of her environment, teaching girls to be angels, pure, and obedient. One teacher says about Becky, "I have nourished a viper in my bosom" (p. 28). The snake is hideous, poisonous, and dangerous, yet quiet and sneaky. This snake image is a common description of "corrupt" women in the works of male authors in the Victorian era. The image often indicates evil and misbehavior as it is used to reinforce the misogynist view of the unfaithful, duplicitous, loathsome, yet mesmerizing figure and character of a female. This negative portrayal of women as snakes has been present since ancient Greek civilization as it is present in mythology, for example, the image of Medusa represents what many famous Greek figures believed in. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir references women's alienation in history by giving examples of their distorted images reflecting the societal view popular amongst Greek authors. Menander said, "There are many monsters on the earth and in the sea, but the greatest is still woman" (cited in Beauvoir, p. 126).

Moreover, this imagery remained popular toward the medieval era. At that time, women were often portrayed in art as exemplifying the world's evil characteristics, rendered in half-monster, half-woman forms, as in Michelangelo's work. This idea stemmed from Christian doctrines, which described the snake as cunning, luring Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. This action initiates the fall of man and places the responsibility for the act squarely on women, negating the concept of female agency. In her *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body* (2010), Sarah Miller states, "(hybrid) bodies marked monstrous by medieval discursive authorities belonged to demons, non-Christians, the so-called monstrous races, freaks of nature, deformed infants, miscarried fetuses, and [...] women" (1). This imagery is discussed further later in the chapter as Thackeray uses it more than once.

In the school, Rebecca wants to be like her friends and to live in an acceptable condition. She criticizes how her society “bows” to the rich not because of intellectuality, wisdom, or achievement, but merely because of money. Thackeray utilizes Becky to criticize the stereotypes of his society:

“What airs that girl gives herself, because she is an Earl’s granddaughter!” she said once. “How they cringe and bow to that Creole because of her hundred thousand pounds. I am a thousand times cleverer and more charming than that creature, for all her wealth. I am as well-bred as Earl’s granddaughter, for all her fine pedigree and yet, when I was at my father’s, did not the men give up their gayest balls and parties in order to pass the evening with me?” (p .30).

Becky demands to be respected and to have a decent life and welfare. That is, the position of the father in Victorian England determines whether the family is valued. As mentioned in the first chapter, Simone de Beauvoir, unlike liberal feminists, emphasizes that achieving equality between men and women can only occur with the realization of the social classification set by the patriarchal class systems that differentiate between women themselves. Becky is frustrated with the social limits that make it difficult for a girl like her to easily achieve her goal. As Beauvoir notes, women’s struggle for class positions may be more successful in enhancing women’s status than individual fights for the rights of women (p. 689). Thackeray’s Becky is perhaps an example of what Beauvoir states. Her dissatisfaction with the capitalist class constraints is a result of her realization of what is necessary to successfully attain her proper status as a woman. Beauvoir’s statement becomes evident as more feminism gains have been achieved since the movement has focused more on classifications of the community rather than on individual rights of women, as many women from various classes, religions, ethnicities, and backgrounds joined the movement.

Rebecca knows that to be independent, she must have economic power. She realizes that despite having no man in her environment to impose control over her, society will not acknowledge her right to be respected and appreciated. When Miss Pinkerton asks Rebecca for an additional task, Rebecca tells her, “I am here to speak French with the children, not to teach them music, and save money for you. Give me money, and I will teach them” (p.28). Becky refuses to allow the authority to take advantage of her. She is aware that she should be paid in exchange for extra

work. As mentioned, Beauvoir emphasizes that it is important to have financial freedom to achieve independence and break the shackles of the patriarchal system that had been constraining women throughout history. Independence in financial gain enables women to live freely. With that freedom, they could have their own house, land, and project. Even in the most patriarchal societies, economic independence can provide a level of general independence for women (Beauvoir, p. 145). However, in exchange, they lose their “ideal woman” label in society and are looked upon as unfeminine, which is how Miss Pinkerton views Becky during her stay at the Girls Academy.

Generally, education of women in the 19th century was limited to talents considered suitable for women, such as singing and domestic manners. Women were taught to prepare themselves for marriage and become the house angels. In the novel’s first chapter, as Becky and Amelia prepare for their exit from the Young Ladies Academy, Becky has a rebellious attitude toward Miss Pinkerton, the head of the academy, when she throws Johnson’s Dictionary from their carriage, which indicates her refusal to be a stereotypical Victorian woman who only listens and obeys (Thackeray, p.17).

Another example of Rebecca’s rebellious attitude against her society’s status is when she screams “Vive la France! Vive l’Empereur! Vive Bonaparte!” (p. 20) as she leaves Miss Pinkerton’s school with Amelia, demonstrating Rebecca’s support for France, which had more freedom for women than England at that time and represents the beginning of England’s movement toward democracy and liberation. Thackeray uses the image of Bonaparte to reflect the nature of Becky herself. Most known for his military brilliance and political power, Napoleon is similar to Becky. She uses her most powerful “weapon”, femininity, as she wages “war” in the “hunt” for a husband. This imagery is reinforced in Thackeray’s title for Chapter II, “In which Miss Sharp and Miss Sedley prepare to open the campaign” (p. 13), which connects marriage with Napoleon’s campaign against England. Rebecca is indeed far from the Victorian motto of “angel in the house”, as she literally acknowledges, “I’m no angel” (p. 20) in reply to the angelic Amelia who believes that praising Bonaparte is similar to praising Lucifer. Thackeray

emphasizes the image of immoral Becky as she praises Lucifer (Bonaparte), the personification of all evils.

Despite her rebellious attitude, Rebecca aims for marriage since women at that time were not supposed to be their own providers. They were reliant on men for support, and when they were required to work, their employment was deemed low status, automatically making the female worker inferior. Generally, in the Victorian period, society believed that it was the responsibility of parents, particularly mothers, to locate a spouse for their daughters. Occasionally, the candidate was chosen by the mother according to her preferences. As mentioned in Chapter One, Beauvoir states that a female has constant guardianship throughout her life. Whether guarded by the father or the mother (whom herself is under guardianship by her husband), a female's ultimate freedom of choice is absent. However, being an orphan from a poor family with so little, Rebecca recognizes at a young age that marrying a wealthy man is the only way to have the desired money and secure a happy life. As Wollstonecraft explains, "the only way women can rise in the world—by marriage" (1792, p. 12).

Rebecca has a strong and independent personality by being her own marriage arranger when she "hunts" for Amelia's brother, Joseph Sedley. For Becky to appear in public while still creating and maintaining a respectable reputation, she must strike a delicate balance. She pretends to be a lady, but her demeanour is more than a ruse: it is the most important tool she has at her disposal to establish a career. Ann Jones (1981) states, "If marriage is a woman's only career, it might as well be her profession" (p. 129). Thackeray's precise description of Becky illustrates this point:

Rebecca was very modest, and holding her green eyes downwards. She was dressed in white, with bare shoulders as white as snow – the picture of youth, unprotected innocence, and humble virgin simplicity. "I must be very quiet," thought Rebecca, "and very much interested about India." (p.29)

In this excerpt, Becky exhibits passivity and embodies the identity of an ideal woman for marriage, which was popular during her time and mentioned heavily in novels and poems of the early 19th century. Thackeray emphasizes whiteness, which represents chastity, virginity, and innocence, features that are highly

required for an “ideal” future wife. The connection of whiteness to femininity is expressed by feminist critics as Gilbert and Gubar (1979) state, “The Victorian iconography of female whiteness is to begin with, most obviously related to the Victorian ideal of feminine purity. The angel in the house is a woman in white” (p. 667). With that quote, Thackeray explicitly analyzes and exposes societal experiences through his characters, indicating, if satirically, his dissatisfaction with the system of marriage that pushes women to openly market themselves to men: “people’s daughters are universally sold in marriage” (Thackeray, p.152). Simone de Beauvoir criticizes the famous myth of purity and virginity. According to her, such myths serve as tools to objectify women and solidify their stance as the Other. Upper-class society implanted in women a notion of “female virginity” and preached the importance of her purity. Martha Vicinus (1972) discusses this concept of feminine chastity, or a woman’s purity and ignorance in sexual affairs, stating: “according to respectable theory all women had ‘mercifully’ bestowed upon them ‘a remnant of the innocence of Paradise.’ Paradisiacal innocence of the knowledge of good and evil disposed young women to preserve their chastity” (p. 156).

The narrator shifts the gender dynamic as Becky appears to transcend her own gender, becoming more masculine than Jos in his first encounter with Becky. Thackeray describes him “as vain as a girl: and perhaps his extreme shyness was one of the results of his extreme vanity” (Thackeray, p. 22). His father also teases him, calling him “vain, selfish, lazy, and effeminate” (p. 52). Thackeray uses sexist terms to criticize social classes of his era. Being called “a girl” or “effeminate” is considered an insult in patriarchal societies. Such feminine descriptions are viewed negatively and linked to weakness. Therefore, any feminine feature means a lack of courage and masculine toughness. These judgments have been deemed normal for hundreds of years due to the general view of women’s “nothingness” (Beauvoir, p. 166) and thus uselessness.

Despite her attempts, Becky fails to lure Jos into her traps after Amelia’s fiancée, George speaks to Jos about her social status and her “lowly” job as a governess. George says this:

Who's this little schoolgirl that is ogling and making love to him? Hang it, the family's low enough without her. A governess is all very well, but I'd rather have a lady for my sister-in-law. I'm a liberal man; but I've proper pride, and know my own station; let her know hers. And I'll take down that great hectoring Nabob, and prevent him from being made a greater fool than he is. That's why I told him to look out, lest she brought an action against him (p. 67).

As stated in the first chapter, a governess in Victorian England, whatever her destiny, would probably be unable to marry and have children due to her subordinate status, which was sometimes precipitated by an unfortunate incident beyond her control (perhaps a male relative's economic failure or a death that resulted in impoverishment). The governess' future sharply contrasts other women's ideal marriage and motherhood fortunes, which was one of the reasons the governess undermined womanhood's idealism. Victorian morality declared marriage to be a woman's destined job, and since the governess was unable to achieve this destiny, she quickly assumed a cynical position in the eyes of society, compounding her social uncertainty. The governess's position neutralized whatever temptation she, as a young woman herself, might have presented to her male associates; to gentlemen, she was a "tabooed woman". (Poovey, 1998, p. 128).

However, the governess's incapacity to embody ideal womanhood was not characterized solely by her inability to marry and reproduce. Other factors aided in reinforcing this impact. One of these factors was employment. Second to the wish for a woman to marry and have children was the wish for her to never work outside the house. Leisure was the new concept of a lady in the middle and upper classes. Due to the growing prestige of the middle class, the ability to hire a private instructress for someone's children was seen as a sign of riches and increasing status. Employing a governess underlined a family's economic prosperity and the lady of the house's leisure, as it was a symbol of one's own nobility. Being a paid governess generated uncomfortable and equivocal responses since the governess suppressed her own attractiveness and position while raising that of her employer. The difficulty was that, contrary to conventional female duty, the governess pursued a masculine paradigm model of independence and empowerment. This devaluation of working-class women was introduced with the emergence of capitalism, though the oppression of women existed prior to capitalism, according

to Beauvoir. Thus, abolishing the capitalist system is the key to end women's oppression and discrimination.

After failing to convince Jos to marry her, Rebecca moves to Queen Crawley's to start her job as a governess. In her new home, Becky is not interested in being a typical governess. Due to her spirit of independence, she is more engaged with Sir Pitt and his businesses to gain knowledge on how to earn and manage money. Thackeray mentions the following:

She read over, with indefatigable patience, all those law papers, with which, before she came to Queen's Crawley, he had promised to entertain her. She volunteered to copy many of his letters, and adroitly altered the spelling of them so as to suit the usages of the present day. She became interested in everything appertaining to the estate, to the farm, the park, the garden, and the stables; and so delightful a companion was she, that the Baronet would seldom take his after-breakfast walk without her (and the children of course), when she would give her advice as to the trees which were to be lopped in the shrubberies, the garden-beds to be dug, the crops which were to be cut, the horses which were to go to cart or plough (p. 173).

The narrator describes in detail Becky's activities in her new home. Such intellectual activities for women were not supported by the patriarchal society at that time, and Rebecca is not the type of woman to be constrained to domesticity. She refuses to be passive during her stay at Queen Crawley's and tries to take advantage of her innate cleverness and talents, which she continues to develop throughout her simple life. Becky's disposal of her stereotypical femininity allows her talents to emerge and flourish. De Beauvoir emphasizes that myths such as femininity and virginity are patriarchal constraints established to suppress women's talents and mental capabilities, thus leading to women's inferiority. Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) emphasizes the importance of education by proving its relationship to gender roles. According to her, all sexes must have equal access to education. Women, like males, have the right to acquire education, enabling women to play an active part in society, both intellectually and physically. A woman who makes effective use of her intellectual and social abilities can never be submissive to a man (p. 29). Thus, education has the potential to eliminate women's subjugation and reliance. However, a lack of education is a crucial issue in women's suffering because it impedes women's advancement, specialization,

and financial independence. As a result, Wollstonecraft asserts that women cannot be compelled to domesticity (p. 4)

Perhaps one of the most important experiences in Becky's life is when she meets Miss Crawley, the wealthy aunt of Becky's future husband, Rawdon. In her first meeting and interaction with the lady, Rebecca earns the lady's respect and affection due to her intelligence and honesty while others are behaving kindly to the lady only to be included in her will. She says to Rebecca,

“What is birth, my dear!” she would say to Rebecca— “Look at my brother Pitt; look at the Huddlestone, look at poor Bute—is any one of them equal to you in intelligence or breeding equal to you? You have more brains than half the shire—if merit had its reward you ought to be a Duchess—no, there ought to be no duchesses at all. I consider you, my love, as my equal.” (p. 201).

Miss Crawley's statement indicates that there is no superiority for men when it comes to intelligence and intellectuality. Despite Rebecca's young age, she is regarded as smarter than the middle-aged men in the novel. Hence, the stereotypical Victorian myth of women's intellectual and mental deficiency due to their “small brains” is debunked by Thackeray. Beauvoir notes that such beliefs enhanced women's subordination as men's body and biology overall were considered normal whilst women's biology was seen as abnormal. Moreover, Thackeray temporarily abolishes social discrimination when making Miss Crawley call and see Rebecca as an equal. Rebecca's charm attracted Miss Crawley's attention because she was not a typical passive young girl. Her independence from an early age helped forge her personality and enhance her intellectual capabilities. Thackeray's idea may have been to illustrate, when given appropriate space, women can excel in the society and compete with men.

In the novel, Rebecca Sharp finally achieves one of her main goals in securing a social raise by secretly marrying Rawdon Crawley. With her husband's anticipated inheritance from his aunt, she would ensure a wealthy lifestyle, but events do not work well for Becky. Despite Miss Crawley adoring Becky, when she discovers her nephew's marriage to the family's governess, she becomes extremely angry and removes Rawdon from her will. The old lady says, “Her mother was a Montmorency” (p. 312). Miss Crawley's actions represent the

patriarchal attitude toward women from lower classes. Despite being a woman herself, Miss Crawley was born and raised in a patriarchal system that enhanced gender roles and supported the class system. The fact that Becky is from a lower social class than Crawley's means she has little chance of surviving in a capitalist society, which led her to marry Rawdon. The majority of people in the Victorian period were obliviously content with the social structure of the nation and with their own particular characteristics. Their obsession with money led to being poor, regardless of one's talents, having no significance in their eyes. Although people welcomed most of the innovations during this time period, they did not forsake their old social ideals and behaviors as a result (Hughes, 1998, p. 1). Thus, de Beauvoir argues that women's empowerment and equality can only be accomplished by eliminating these social structures and barriers.

After being excluded from Miss Crawley's will, Rawdon and Rebecca leave her house and live in a separate place as husband and wife. With no fixed income for the family, Rebecca encourages her husband to play cards since he is a talented card player. Rebecca's relationship with Rawdon as a wife is not stereotypical. Rebecca is not confined to her household duties of an "ideal" wife, and she enjoys liberty and independence by marrying someone she has chosen for herself. For Rawdon, his marriage to Rebecca is not to enhance his social status since Rebecca is simply a poor governess. In fact, he loves Rebecca sincerely. In general, marriage in which the husband and wife share friendship and partnership is a success. As stated in the previous chapter, marriage at that time became only a tool to serve the patriarchy, as de Beauvoir notes that a wife suffers throughout her life with a range of domestic tasks: she cooks, sweeps, washes clothes, raises her children, and spends her whole life serving her husband and children. Consequently, marriage loses its worth. She is treated callously in exchange for the services she has given (p. 442).

By eliminating gender roles imposed on women at this time, Thackeray builds a dynamic duo that promises chemistry in their marriage. Becky becomes the supporting strong friend and companion to Rawdon, achieving what Wollstonecraft notes: "the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practicing various virtues, become the

friend, and not merely the humble dependent of her husband” (p.23). However, with Becky’s continuous greed imposed by Thackeray to support his vision of his picara, this partnership failed. Becky and Rawdon may not fulfil typical husband and wife roles, but since they have a common goal, which is earning and building a household, they are brought together in this dynamic.

Thackeray describes Becky’s relationship with Rawdon in detail as he marks the characteristics of the stereotypical devout and doting wife of his era:

When he came home she was alert and happy: when he went out she pressed him to go: when he stayed at home, she played and sang for him, made him good drinks, superintended his dinner, warmed his slippers, and steeped his soul in comfort (p. 208).

Thackeray draws the duties of an ideal Victorian wife precisely in this novel. The husband is expected to be pampered by his soft wife who enriches him with comfort, in addition to the cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children. However, since Thackeray knows that Becky’s actions are faked, he is not deceived by her show of domestic serenity as he adds his own view regarding this hypocrisy:

The best of women (I have heard my grandmother say) are hypocrites. We don’t know how much they hide from us: how watchful they are when they seem most artless and confidential: how often those frank smiles which they wear so easily, are traps to cajole or elude or disarm – I don’t mean your mere coquettes, but your domestic models, and paragons of female virtue. (p. 208)

The narrator believes that a woman who realizes the chance to use duplicity for her own advantage is definitely dangerous since she is a hypocrite. In the narrator’s society, it was believed that a woman, even if she did not love her husband, should still “act” as a source of love and tenderness to him. She should fake her love and care for him to be labelled as the “best of women”. She even must look happy in his presence. If she expressed her true feelings toward her husband, she was deemed a madwoman. This hypocrisy had been known throughout centuries as Thackeray’s grandmother confirms. This situation stabilizes woman’s position as the Other and elevates man’s status as the One.

In analysing Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, T. Gwilliam (1991) mentions this female duplicity as she states, “once femininity’s doubleness is extolled for its ability to provoke pleasure or to create identification, the woman’s power to use

duplicity – her body’s multiplicity – for her own ends has been set in motion and cannot be recalled” (p. 26). Thackeray recognizes this potential as he says the following earlier in the novel:

“A woman with fair opportunities, and without an absolute hump, may marry WHOM SHE LIKES. Only let us be thankful that the darlings are like the beasts of the field, and do not know their own power. They would overcome us entirely if they did” (54).

Rebecca is precisely the kind of “darling” that the writers of conduct literature appear to fear: someone who understands how to navigate inside the system of feminine ideals to secure a higher position. Thackeray also mentions the fears of the patriarchal societies if women realize their potential, which is the main reason for the patriarchal suppression of women. Patriarchal societies fear women’s awareness and hold double standards against women as they see them as dangerous creatures who threaten their thrones, but the same time, they chase them and cannot live without their closeness. Beauvoir argues in her psychoanalysis approach that these ideas are subconscious exits in the brain of man to protect his transcendence. As a result, with constantly behaving in accordance with the imposed domestic norms, women can never be properly appreciated since they are never permitted to express their true selves.

Another sign of Becky’s brilliance is mostly revealed when she travels with her husband to Belgium for war during her pregnancy. Despite this circumstance, she prospers in the economic world of trade when she sells her husband’s horses to Jos for an outrageous sum after taking advantage of his weakness in front of her. As Beauvoir (1956) states, pregnancy was one of the issues that led women to be left behind. Throughout history, it was believed that women’s abilities would decrease significantly during menstrual periods and pregnancy; thus, women remained behind men in all domains (p. 70). Becky is courageous enough when she negotiates a deal during the war without her husband. She then pretends to consider an offer from Lady Bareacres (a member of a high-class society), who had continuously insulted Becky and talked poorly of her. Becky has the great Lady beg her to sell her the horses, only to reject her. Following this humiliation, Rebecca had the pleasure of witnessing her Ladyship in the horseless carriage, keeping her gaze set on her and lamenting

the countess's difficulties in the loudest tone possible. Becky's savage retaliation is displayed clearly in this excerpt:

“Not to be able to get horses!” she said, “and to have all those diamonds sewed into the carriage cushions! What a prize it will be for the French when they come! the carriage and the diamonds, I mean; not the lady!” She gave this information to the landlord, to the servants, to the guests, and the innumerable stragglers about the courtyard (p. 627).

Thackeray abolishes social class constraints and satirizes his society using a woman from a low-class background. According to Beauvoir, Becky achieves what many men fear: women's competition in the field of economics. However, this portrayal of Becky's act indicates that the field of business, which was occupied exclusively by men of high ranks at that time, is full of deception and hypocrisy. Perhaps Thackeray wants his reader to examine Becky's embodiment of a male Victorian merchant in a male-dominated society.

After the war, Becky turns the house into a place of amusement where her husband plays cards with men from high ranks in society while she entertains her guests with her charms. By turning her home into a place of parties, Becky starts to exhibit signs of failure in maintaining the concept of an ideal woman in her society. According to the norms of the 19th century, home was felt to be the center of moral virtue and considered a refuge against the brutality of the outside world (Arnstein, 1988, p. 88).

Becky fails to maintain a warm place for her little son. She also mistreats him and sends him to private schools, which is perhaps the only unforgivable act in Rebecca's life. Thackeray portrays Becky as a monster in the eyes of her son, which makes it hard for the reader to sympathize with her. However, her behavior can only be understood if she thinks that it is impossible to raise a child while she is embodying the role of a Victorian man in controlling economics. Thackeray portrays Becky as a rebel against Victorian Romanticism who contradicts the norms. Beauvoir, as an existentialist, proves this rebellion as she accuses motherhood of being an oppressive entity that has significant influence on women's positions. The notion of motherhood was critical in defining women's roles in society throughout the 1960s. For Beauvoir, the “natural” women's motherhood duty is the primary reason for women's social injustice.

According to Patterson (1986), women drag themselves into slavery by marrying and having children (p. 87). Beauvoir views motherhood as an obstacle to achieving social freedom, which is why she has no children herself.

From a feminist point of view, however, perhaps Becky feels imprisoned by having to take care of a baby while focusing on economics and earnings especially with her husband's laziness and narrow intelligence. The male-dominated Victorian culture relegated women to the status of sex objects, mothers, commodities, or all three, contributing to the rise of man as the One. Women who liberate themselves from being defined by these labels and dare to push the boundaries of this traditional idea of femininity must bear the consequences of their bold endeavor. Any woman who refuses these traditional qualities is not considered a true woman (Schweitzer, 1990, p. 168). Becky sees her son as a hurdle in her drive for popularity and richness and feels she should detach herself from any barrier in her attempts to conquer the society. These actions lead to the narrator's disapproval of her actions. Harriet Blodgett (1967) states, "the narrator knows her (Becky) for a morally and socially reprehensible being incapable of warm human relationships" (p. 97).

Becky's final main endeavor in the novel is her relationship with the Lord of Steyne. In one of the parties hosted by him, Rebecca dresses like Clytemnestra and plays her role while her husband plays Agamemnon in one of the shows. Thackeray puts Becky in a perfect disguise as Clytemnestra, just like Becky, challenged gender roles from the beginning of the novel and breaks the limitations of ideal womanhood. Clytemnestra dominates the play and every character, similar to Becky. She serves as the diva, the actress, and the manager of the novel, who uses and forces her "manly" qualities to achieve her goals. As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, Becky is viewed through the eyes of the narrator and other characters as possessing superior intelligence and intellectual abilities, just as Clytemnestra is known for having more power than Agamemnon and Aegisthus. Clytemnestra represents a woman with reversed gender roles in her society who is a subject rather than an object. By killing Rawdon (in the play), Thackeray creates a revolution against the subject of the Hegelian dialect highlighted by Beauvoir. As mentioned in the first chapter, a

slave can declare hostility in the master-slave dialect, but in the subject-object dialect of men and women, women cannot do the same since they share life with men. Through this scene, Thackeray depicts the beginning of the evolution of women's status. Pomeroy (1994) states that "womanly behavior was characterized then by submissiveness and modesty" (p. 98). The language employed by Clytemnestra is none of these. Instead, she "adopts characteristics of the dominant sex to achieve [her] goals" (p. 98). Rebecca adopts the same features throughout the novel to attain her goals, which eventually lead to her separation (death) from her marriage and her ideal womanhood.

Thackeray then seems unable to avoid sexist similes and descriptions as he describes Becky as a siren with a magical power who seduces men to their watery deaths, much as Clytemnestra seduces Agamemnon to his bath in order to murder him:

In describing this siren, singing and smiling, coaxing and cajoling, the author, with modest pride, asks his readers all around, has he once forgotten the laws of politeness, and showed the monster's hideous tail above water? No! Those who like may peep down under waves that are pretty transparent, and see it writhing and twirling, diabolically hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling around corpses; but above the water line, I ask, has not everything been proper, agreeable, and decorous. (p. 746)

As this paragraph reveals, the monster not only may be hidden behind the angel but may also live inside the angel. The description of Becky as a siren, especially from a male author and narrator, reflects the stereotypes of Victorian male authors (e.g., Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens). Victorian society was firmly patriarchal, and women were seen as weak, unable of controlling their emotions, devoid of soul, and destined to be dominated rather than to lead. These attitudes about women culminated in the creation of intrinsically sexual feminine characters.

As mentioned in the first chapter, male writings have historically included Thackeray's serpentine siren monsters. In their freakishness, these women possess hazardous energies and have strong, deadly skills. They are also emblems of filthy materialism dedicated exclusively to their own selfish aims. De Beauvoir notes that these women are accidents of nature, deformities

designed to rebel. They represent the other side of women, which men secretly desire (p. 243). These sirens are the “incarnate male dread of women and, specifically, male scorn of female creativity, such characters have drastically affected the self-images of women writers, negatively reinforcing those messages of submissiveness conveyed by their angelic sisters” (Gilbert and Gubar, p. 338). Gilbert and Gubar imply that because of males’ dread of women, male writers create this monster sorceress image in their works. This image reflects the males’ ambivalent feelings toward women at that time: they both loved and feared women. This vision of Becky as a snake-siren more strongly indicates the narrator’s erotic fantasy than Becky’s deadly sexuality. If Becky is a demon with an extraordinary and developing “taste for disrespectability” (p. 1048), she is not a freak of nature, but a freak of a society, which has a vision of heavenly femininity prioritizing religion above erotic desire. Becky’s dodgy persona embodies the potential for demonic and malicious female sexuality in contrast to her actual opposite in the novel, Amelia, the personification of Victorian femininity.

In the end, though deemed sexism, transforming women into sexual objects also empowers women. As sirens have demonstrated, seduction is a potent weapon. Sirens attract the attention of seafaring men through a combination of seduction and trickery. Their seductive chants entice men to their island of bones. Sirens then seduce males into believing they are the target of the siren’s adoration. In reality, the men are merely puppets used by the siren to achieve what she desires.

One of the main controversies in the novel is Rebecca’s suspected adultery with Lord Steyne. Thackeray uses ambiguity when describing the incident and leaves the final judgment to his readers. Her servants already have seen her as “lost and ruined” (p. 700). Her brother-in-law also suspects, but he is sceptical. When Rawdon confronts her and Lord Steyne and accuses them of adultery, Thackeray uses the snake-serpent imagery and ties it to Rebecca: “her own (hands) were all covered with serpents, and rings, and baubles” (p. 1071). The image of Becky’s hands covered with “serpents” indicates the same monster-woman image from the age of antiquity. Thackeray describes Becky’s hands as

evil, poisonous, devilish, and destructive since he sees her drift away from his ideality. However, Lord Steyne's response reflects the high-class patriarchal view of lower-class women:

"You innocent! Damn you," he screamed out. "You innocent? Why, every trinket you have on your body is paid for by me. I have given you thousands of pounds which this fellow has spent, and for which he has sold you. Innocent by – ! You're as innocent as your mother, the ballet-girl, and your husband the bully." (p. 843)

As mentioned previously, Beauvoir emphasizes one's own existence, and as she states, "the existent is a body". A woman's body belongs to herself, not to any other individual whether male or female. Patriarchal systems exploit women's bodies and claim ownership of them because they consider women of less value than men. Lord Steyne paying Rebecca for her singing and entertainment does not give him the right to "own" her body. Beauvoir states that women are supposed to behave as sexual objects, which is exclusively how patriarchal men see them (pp. 588-590). Moreover, the view of Rebecca's parents does not change despite the social climbing she has achieved. Regardless of her act with Lord Steyne, she would still be looked upon as a lowly woman by the capitalist society even if she behaves well since her mother was a dancer.

After the incident with Lord Steyne, Becky and Rawdon separate. Becky meets with Jos Sedley again, and she successfully secures a significant sum of money from him before he dies. In the end, Becky abides by the norms of her society. She contributes to charity services as well as attends religious meetings. Thackeray tries to steer Rebecca to the feminine stereotypes of his era as many women in the 19th century were involved in charity and fundraising. However, after a while, she feels her new life is too dull and returns to her original lifestyle, which includes gambling and roaming from place to place, indicating once a woman falls, she cannot return to her previous state. Thackeray describes Becky as "of a wild, roving nature, inherited from father and mother, who were both Bohemians" (p. 1040), which confirms that his views align with Lord Steyne's patriarchal view but with more politeness since Thackeray does not wear any mask in this sentence.

To end this, Thackeray describes Becky as follows: “she would now be absolutely independent of the world” (p. 487). He emphasizes that having money is a means to secure independence not only from men, but also from any societal constraints. Becky’s greatest achievement is her enemies’ defeat as she reaches the top of the power pyramid. Thackeray uses Becky to satirize the materialistic and money-oriented English society. This use derives from his desire to choose a low-status individual, a poor, orphan female, humiliating and satirizing a high rank woman to illustrate the fragility of societal standards. As he states later in the novel, “everybody is striving for what is not worth the having!” (p. 966). He also uses her to enhance the idea of the rise of women in general and those who come from lower classes specifically.

THIRD CHAPTER

3. CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN'S OBJECTIFICATION IN *JANE EYRE*

Jane Eyre (1847) by Charlotte Brontë is widely recognized as an excellent literary masterpiece, a fictional biography, and a classic Bildungsroman. The story is a first-person narration by Jane, which gives the reader a perspective of events through the eyes of a Victorian female. She progresses toward her search for identity and love, striking parallels between her existence and the lives and duties of women in early Victorian society. Jane Eyre becomes an outsider because of her yearning for respect, justice, knowledge, and the opportunity to be true to herself. Throughout her journey, she faces multiple obstacles toward her goals, but she successfully overcomes them despite physical and mental sacrifice. Her story begins as an eight-year-old orphan living in her late uncle's house and undergoing harsh treatment and discrimination due to her financial status and gender. Then, her uncle's wife sends her to an orphanage where she accumulates knowledge while suffering the terrible conditions of the institute. Later, she becomes a governess at Thornfield where she meets her future lover Mr. Rochester. While Rochester first projects an image of a Byronic hero to the audience, he eventually loses the majority of this power when he loses his sight, bodily wholeness, and riches, all of which relieve him of his overwhelming passion and ego and bring him to a fitting position to marry Jane. The novel concludes when Jane experiences true empowerment through marriage to Rochester while maintaining equal footing.

From the outset, Brontë portrays Jane's childhood as miserable. In the first chapter, little Jane is kept away from a gathering of her aunt and her children until she can "acquire a more sociable and child-like disposition, a more attractive and sprightly manner – something lighter, franker, more natural as it were" (Brontë, p. 9). Brontë presents Jane as an unnatural being who is alienated from her environment. When attempting to understand why she is receiving such a punishment, she is told that "there is something truly forbidding in a child taking

up her elders in that manner” (Brontë, pp. 9-10). This scene highlights not only a central theme in the novel, which is self-discovery, but also emphasizes Jane’s rationality and sense of logic in attempting to comprehend her society’s manners, norms, and traditions. These short remarks illustrate that Jane’s voice is rejected. From the start of the novel until she leaves for Lowood school, Jane undergoes an unwavering hostility, apparently regardless of her actions. This hostility includes being locked up in a room where she imagines her uncle’s ghost, as well as being described as bad animal, a rat and mad cat (Brontë, pp. 11-15). These prejudices against Jane set the tone of the novel for Jane’s quest for identity.

In Victorian times, children were mainly seen as a means of amusement and entertainment. They were expected to be obedient beings who lack a sophisticated inner world (Sloman, 1974, p. 108). Indeed, Jane is reduced to this level in her environment, even by the house servants. Abbott instructs her, “it is your place to be humble and to try to make yourself agreeable to them” (Brontë, p 16). As a result, Jane invests much effort into identifying the main reason for her continuous punishment as she ponders, “why was I always suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, forever condemned? Why could I never please? Why was it useless to try to win anyone’s favor?” (Brontë, p. 18). In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir refers to children’s reaction when being deprived of their parents’ care and affection:

in a bodily form he discovers finitude, solitude, and abandonment in an alien world; he tries to compensate for this catastrophe by alienating his existence in an image whose reality and value will be established by others. It would seem that from the moment he recognises his reflection in a mirror [...] he begins to affirm his identity. His self is merging with this reflection in such a way that it is formed only by alienating itself (Beauvoir, p. 294).

In the above excerpt, Beauvoir states that when children endure such a catastrophe, they abandon some aspect of their own existence to another existence that is determined by others. An incident from Jane’s upbringing has a particularly striking resemblance to this remark. Jane is imprisoned in her uncle’s old chamber prior to her confused thoughts about why she is incapable of pleasing others:

I had to cross before the looking-glass; my fascinated glance involuntarily explored the depth it revealed. All looked colder and darker in that visionary hollow than in reality: and the strange little figure there gazing at me, with a white face and arms specking the gloom, and glittering eyes of fear moving where all else was still, had the effect of a real spirit (Brontë, p. 18).

Jane is drawing an image from her surroundings to reflect her identity as seen by others, and she seems to accept the image she is addressed with daily. Following her self-reflection, she exclaims, "All said I was wicked, and perhaps I might be so" (Brontë, p. 19), emphasizing her acceptance of such an image. Brontë portrays Jane as having a strong inner world while simultaneously demonstrating her conflict to meet the demands imposed by the older people around her. Jane continues by remarking that her reflection resembles that of a half-fairy, half-imp (Brontë, p. 18). Thus, Jane's existence and true worth is imprisoned in a transparent representation, as Beauvoir describes. While her logical mind considers her situation cruel and unfair, (Brontë, p. 19), her failure to grow as a natural young girl has made her feel like the Other. At this stage in the narrative, Jane's identity is fragmented and lacking in clarity since she has still not formed the sense of independence that she would notoriously employ later in the novel.

Jane is despised not just for her inability to seem a normal child, but also for her lack of feminine Victorian characteristics. As mentioned in the first chapter, Beauvoir asserts that women are not born; rather, they are created through social and familial standards. These standards shape females' lives from their childhood, and one of the methods used in this process is providing different toys for boys and for girls. Extending on this concept, Jane makes a sad comment about her doll:

To this crib I always took my doll [...] I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded craven image [...] I could not sleep unless it was folded in my nightgown; and when it lay there safe and warm, I was comparatively happy, believing it to be happy likewise (Brontë, p. 35).

Being and feeling alone, Jane needs a companion she can receive warmth from. To alleviate her loneliness, she seeks solace in her doll. After starting to

believe that she is a wicked child, she associates her enjoyment with an observed object, thus alienating herself by setting her existence in relation to an object, which solidifies her identity as the Other. Beauvoir describes this form of behavior, claiming that it is different from that of boys, who are able prevent their alienation by themselves:

A little girl cannot incarnate herself in any part of her own body. As compensation, and to fill the role of the alter ego for her, she is given a foreign object: a doll. [...] the doll represents the whole body and, on the other hand, it is a passive thing. As such, the little girl will be encouraged to alienate herself in her person as a whole and to consider it as an inert given (Beauvoir, pp. 303-304).

Jane's alienation from herself is observed both in her obvious inability to be a nice child and in her inability to fully fit Victorian feminine ideals. In contrast, Georgiana, "who would be more moving in the same condition" (Brontë, p. 31) due to her closeness to the ideal image of femininity, establishes herself as a favorite female child who is agreeable to the adults.

Dissatisfied with oppression and beginning to realize her true self, young Jane Eyre starts to reject the projected image of her existence that has been imposed by the adults in her house as she attacks the source of this image itself: her aunt. Her fight with Mrs. Reed starts with a rebellious "Speak I must" (Brontë, p. 43) phrase, emphasizing that she feels unable to forge a true identity and is at risk of dying while being subjugated if she does not project her own voice. Therefore, she backs her phrase up with:

"Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt. It seemed as if an invisible bond had burst, and that I had struggled out into unhopd-for liberty" (Brontë, p. 44).

Jane's audacity has endowed her with a sense of independence, empowerment, and liberty. While this does not imply that she is entirely free of the Reed family impact for the remainder of the novel, it is a significant step toward discovering her true self and cementing her identity in a manner that will benefit her in future encounters. This growth is heightened by the first-person narrative, which provides insight into Jane's present and future thoughts.

Jane's childhood suffering is also marked by the bullying of her cousin John, who represents the patriarchal authority imposed on young Jane in the novel. In discussing the roots of females' subordination, Simone de Beauvoir theorizes that, from childhood, women have been indoctrinated into a gender role that is inferior to the role of men, and when a woman suppresses the thought of equality, she automatically incorporates herself into a man's life (Beauvoir, pp. 717-718). In the first chapters of the novel, John orders Jane to address him as "Master Reed" (Brontë, p. 11), demonstrating the male dominance and superiority of Brontë's era. Jane mentions in detail how John Reed cast fear into the little girl's heart in this excerpt:

He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in a day, but continually every nerve had feared him, and every morsel of flesh on my bones shrank when he came near. There were moments when I was bewildered by the terror he inspired. (Brontë, p.12)

Brontë expresses how the oppression of patriarchy makes young girls remain fearful of males as they grow, thus suppressing any potential voices of liberation and equality. However, with her portrayal of Jane, Brontë creates a character determined to write her own destiny by prioritizing her autonomy.

Moreover, Brontë remarks that the Reeds' oppression of Jane is also due to her low-class. Brontë criticizes the capitalist social classes that solidify women's subordination. For example, Jane is bullied and restricted by John Reed when she tries to read books:

You have no business to take our books; you are a dependent, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentleman's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mama's expense (Brontë, p. 12).

Jane is viewed as a dependent being, someone whose existence is predetermined by the social status of her parents. Jane exists in a realm between the upper and working classes. Despite feeling inferior in comparison to John's physicality, Jane fiercely strikes back at his scolding and calls him "murderer", "slave-driver", and "Roman emperor" (Brontë, p.13), which not only highlights Jane's rebellious attitude, but also demonstrates her high intellectual level as she

chooses her words accurately to describe him. By using these descriptions, Jane highlights the class distinction as her feeling of physical inferiority translates into a class inferiority. By defying this tyranny, Jane defies the typical female submission to class and gender restrictions.

Afterward, Jane is sent to Lowood school by Mrs. Reed, where she continues to endure hardships, prejudices, and more gender roles. In her quest for freedom and equality, Jane seems excited to attend school, perceiving it as “an entire separation from Gateshead, an entrance to a new life” (Brontë, p. 57). However, at Lowood, Jane is met with another patriarchal obstacle, Mr. Brocklehurst. Mrs. Reed repeatedly requests Mr. Brocklehurst guarantee Jane is “brought up in a manner suiting her prospects” and “trained in conformity to her position and prospects” (Brontë, pp. 41-42). Ayyıldız outlines gender expectations as follows:

the status, rights and duties of women cannot be generalized since they varied according to the social class they came from. It indicates that social class determines the traditional ways of women’s lives, because the Victorians believed that each class has its own standards and people were expected to conform to the roles of their classes. (Ayyıldız, 2017, p. 147).

Mrs. Reed is keen to place Jane in a class different from her real and higher one (owing to her ties with the Reed family). Jane’s inclusion at Lowood represents a societal shift, which results in additional gender expectations. Despite Mrs. Reed’s numerous attempts to shatter Jane’s identity by complaining how Jane fails to achieve her expectations of being both a child and a girl of her class status, Jane’s trials have neither destroyed nor placated her. Rather, as demonstrated previously, Jane seems to have become braver and less scared of the repercussions of speaking up. Thus, since class plays a vital role in women’s subordination, Mrs. Reed has chosen to shift Jane’s social class and move her to another realm to again tarnish her identity and make it more difficult for Jane to acquire the happiness and independence she seeks.

At Lowood, Jane and the other girls endure harsh conditions and treatment backed by the religious hypocrisy of Mr. Brocklehurst, who Jane describes as “a black pillar [...] a sable clad shape standing erect on the rug: the grim face at the

top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital” (Brontë, p. 25). Mr. Brocklehurst represents the “Victorian super-ego” (Gilbert, 1979, p. 343), and he is described as a phallogocentric character, emphasizing the patriarchal dominance symbolism. He uses religion as a means of oppression, threatening non-submissive girls with hell and God’s punishment, thus suppressing their identities and freedom. Beauvoir argues that religion has historically been used to justify the compensation of women. The patriarchal society has used religion as a vehicle to lift man as “the master by divine right” (p. 747), which results in women accepting their status and neglecting any temptations to revolt against their conditions.

Despite the ugly environment, Jane meets a motherly figure in Miss Temple who represents the angel in the house (Gilbert, p. 345). Miss Temple plays a significant role in supporting Jane’s quest for respect and equality, as she offers help and advice to Jane throughout her stay at Lowood. For instance, Jane is severely punished by Mr. Brocklehurst for the accusation of lying, leading her to consider killing herself. Brontë uses this scene to emphasize the religious element in the novel since suicide for the oppressed symbolizes martyrdom, an escape from the patriarchal oppression and an elevation to God (Beauvoir, p. 184). Miss Temple urges Jane to speak and defend herself against false accusations, saying, “when a criminal is accused, he is always allowed to speak in his defense. You have been charged with falsehood; defend yourself to me as well as you can. Say whatever your memory suggests as true” (Brontë, p. 60). Miss Temple’s words suggest that others will believe Jane if Jane uses her voice to prove her honesty, thus emphasizing the importance of one’s voice in building her identity.

In such a religious institute, girls in Lowood are mainly taught with “Silence” and “Order” (Brontë, p. 37), two terms that repress their autonomy and solidify their submission. Moreover, the girls were starved to have their bodies “regulated” as part of religious spirituality. These acts are made “to serve a Master whose kingdom is not of this world” (Brontë, p. 96), as Mr. Brocklehurst claims that his main job is to “mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh” (Brontë, p. 97). Using this method, he ensures the girls remain in their low-class and accept their fate. With the exploitation and regulation of the girls’ bodies, submission occurs

in their hearts and souls. Lowood's strict religious teachings, however, do not apply to Mr. Brocklehurst and his family. During one of his family's visits, Jane notes,

three other visitors, ladies, now entered the room [...] The two younger of the trio [...] had grey beaver hats, then in fashion, shaded with ostrich plumes, and from under the brim of this graceful headdress fell a profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled; the elder lady was enveloped in a costly velvet shawl, trimmed with ermine, and she wore a false front of French curls (pp. 54-55).

This excerpt illustrates that the rules imposed by Mr. Brocklehurst are merely because of class distinction and not his high level of belief. On the one hand, he declares that curls are not appropriate for "the children of Grace" (Brontë, p. 54), but on the other hand, his own daughter flaunts French curling. However, since the girls at Lowood are orphans of lower class, they are only seen as servants or slaves, who should embrace poverty and hardships.

Along with Miss Temple, Jane finds companionship with Helen Burns. Burns comforts Jane by saying, "If all the world hated you, and believed you wicked, while your own conscience approved you, and absolved you from guilt, you would not be without friends" (Brontë, p. 82). Helen accomplishes two feats here. First, she educates Jane on the value of recognizing the truth for oneself and believing in that truth when all else fails. Second, she tells Jane that it is sometimes necessary to reject external inscriptions on herself to protect her identity from potential threats. With Helen's help and companionship, Jane gradually begins to re-establish the sense of bravery she had against Mrs. Reed when she protected her identity from destruction or ambiguity. Furthermore, Jane observes the effect school requirements have on Helen, who becomes dangerously sick yet tells Jane, "By dying young, I shall escape great sufferings. I had not qualities or talents to make my way very well in the world: I should have been continually at fault" (Brontë, p. 97). Helen sees herself in a circumstance in which her real experience is censured for failing to transform into the idealized version of her performed identity. Jane identifies the detrimental effects of the illusion of a gender-based foundation after observing the result of the conflict between lived and performed identity on a woman. Moreover, Helen's companionship and

eventual death is critical to Jane's persistent growth as an individual and is a chief reason she maintains her selfhood for the remainder of the story. As long as she believes she is acting in accordance with her conscience, she is living her lived personality and not harmfully integrating the performed identity with herself.

After the time she spends in Lowood, Jane applies for a new job as a governess. As stated in the first chapter, women who held a low social status in the Victorian era did not have many opportunities to earn a living other than being governesses. Jane recognizes the importance of economic independence for one's autonomy. Financial independence from men assists in establishing women as producers of valuable goods within the capitalist framework and granting them access to various spheres. Jane recognizes the potential of economic independence to mould and redefine a woman's social conditions as well as her own feelings about her identity: "The system based on her dependence collapses as soon as she ceases to be a parasite; there is no longer need for a masculine mediator between her and the universe" (Beauvoir, p. 737). Beauvoir contends that with better accessibility for women to the public sphere, the power dynamic will balance, since it will no longer be exclusively male dominated.

With her transition to her new job as a governess at Thornfield, Jane becomes restless. Miss Temple's leave removes "the serene atmosphere", leading Jane to be "left in my natural element, beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions" (Brontë, p. 72). Miss Temple had a motherly soothing impact on Jane; now that she is gone, Jane seeks more from life. Her repressed restlessness rises, and she desires to explore more of the world beyond the boundaries of Lowood as well as her new home at Thornfield. A Victorian governess's position was perilous. A governess did not belong to either family or servants and receiving contrasting signals about their place in the home created an unclear and sometimes lonely situation (Gilbert, p. 349). Jane needs to be surrounded by people she finds engaging and with whom she can have exciting conversations and discussions. However, throughout her stay at Thornfield, prior to Mr. Rochester's arrival, she encounters little intellectual stimulation, and her feeling of restlessness gradually deepens. This feeling makes Jane reflect on the general state of women in dealing with such circumstance:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (Brontë, p. 95)

This excerpt demonstrates a feminist perspective on the assigned gender roles of men and women in the Victorian era, alluding to Brontë's personal experience. This paragraph reveals how men are treated as the One, while women are treated as the Other. Brontë notes that this situation was normal during her era. Beauvoir states that "the category of the Other is as original as consciousness itself" (pp. 6-7), and the mentioned "feminine" activities place women as the Other. Moreover, Jane's feeling of restlessness and stagnation serve as examples for the main theme of confinement in the novel. Jane's sense of confinement is extended to other women of her society, and Brontë critiques what she perceives to be restrictive Victorian ideals of traditional gender roles. The paragraph clearly explains that men and women are equal and that women should receive the same opportunities as men when dealing with and exploring life. This paragraph reflects Jane's aspiration for equality and freedom as it represents a "dissatisfaction with the social order" (Gilbert, p. 369). Jane's restlessness is alleviated by the arrival of the Master of Thornfield. Finally, according to the quote, Brontë's works perhaps have been her vehicle in dealing with such state. Jane reveals how she withdraws into her own head to achieve liberation through her imagination.

Mr. Rochester marks his presence in Jane's life as a dark Byronic hero from a fairy tale. In the book, he makes a somewhat theatrical entry, as Jane describes: "it was exactly one form of Bessie's Gytrash – a lion-like creature with long hair and a huge head" (Brontë, p. 97). Rochester looks to be the "very essence of patriarchal energy" (Gilbert, p. 351) with his warrior-like portrayal. According to Robert Chase, the Brontë sisters were "obsessed" with the world of male sexuality (Gilbert, p. 351), as shown by Jane's aversion to Mr. Mason's "too relaxed"

features and the fact that “the life looking out of” his eyes “was a tame, vacant life” (Brontë, p. 166). Rochester, in contrast, displays instant vulnerability by injuring himself when his horse falls, saying, “necessity compels me to make you useful” (Brontë, p. 136). This first encounter places Jane as part of Beauvoir’s dialect, where the Other is necessary to the One. This necessity leads Jane to receive the affection and adoration of the Master of Thornfield. Briefly becoming acquainted with him, she feels as though they have a deep bond:

I felt at times as if he were my relation rather than my master [...] I ceased to pine for kindred: my thin crescent-destiny seemed to enlarge; the blanks of existence were filled up; my bodily health improved; I gathered flesh and strength (Brontë, p. 128).

Rochester brings interest to Jane’s life through the intellectual stimulation provided by their nightly conversations, which lacked before to his arrival. While Jane and Rochester can be considered cognitively equal, several inequalities exist between them.

Jane and Rochester’s relationship is challenged by a power disparity. Their relationship is uneven on several levels: he is two decades older, considerably more experienced, from a higher social class, her master, and wealthy while she is impoverished. These factors were significant barriers at the Victorian era. Owing to their master-employee relationship, she can speak with him only when he summons her, and she is unable to seek his company at will. Using this circumstance, Brontë maintains the gothic element of the novel by portraying Rochester as a dark, mysterious, and hard to reach Byronic hero. In one of their meetings, while witnessing Jane’s confidence, Rochester seeks to solidify his stance as a master, basing his argument on his “superiority” in gender, age, and social status as he asks Jane about this gap: “do you agree with me that I have a right to be a little masterful, abrupt, perhaps exacting, sometimes” (Brontë, p. 157). Jane exhibits her resilience by rebuking Rochester:

I don’t think, sir that you have a right to command me, merely because you are older than I, or because you have seen more of the world than I have; your claim to superiority depends on the use you have made of your time and experience (Brontë, p. 157).

Despite Rochester being older and more mature than Jane, she still disputes his authority over her throughout their conversations. She implies that Rochester's superiority is only a result of a predetermined advantage given to him by society because of his "superior" gender, which allows him to conquer the world. Rochester responds to her, "I mentally shake hands with you for your answer" (Brontë, p. 158). Rochester and Jane appear to evade assigning definite positions to themselves, preferring to keep their relationship as equal as possible without disturbing societal standards of the period. This preference perhaps defies their relationship as a type of the Beauvoirian dialect since Jane and Rochester develop a thorough knowledge of one another through open and dignified dialogue. Rochester appears to be a "father-man" because of his age and influence. As a "father-surrogate," he could represent the author's yearning for her ideal partner (Dooley, p. 241). Moreover, Jane's subconscious may be searching for a father figure to fill the void left by her fatherless upbringing.

With the development of their relationship, mutual awareness grows. Rochester admits that "The more you and I converse the better; for while I cannot blight you, you may refresh me" (Brontë, p. 168). Rochester's disinterest in fixing himself is the only self-consciousness in his relationship with Jane. He expresses that he cannot hurt or suppress Jane's identity, but rather he recognizes how her open and transparent persona has been valuable to him. Brontë gradually removes the social barrier between them by portraying an equal relationship of two autonomous and strong human beings. Beauvoir notes:

when it will be possible for the woman to love in her strength and not in her weakness, not to escape from herself but to find herself, not out of resignation but to affirm herself, love will become for her as for man the source of life and not a mortal danger. (p. 724).

In connection to the above quote, Brontë presents a lively image of affection between Jane and Rochester. Brontë initiates Jane's love story in the time frame when she has already accumulated strength and self-awareness through her experiences at Mrs. Reed's house and Lowood. For Jane, love is not a means to escape from her fears and terrible memories, rather it is a mutual affection which contributes to her existence.

Moving forward, Rochester tests whether Jane accepts a relationship more akin to that of master/slave due to his fear of exposing his secret (Bertha Mason). He refers to Jane as a healer for his past. Jane dismisses his approach exclaiming that “reformation should never depend on a fellow-creature” (Brontë, p. 252). Jane reveals to Rochester that autonomy and identity should not be abandoned for someone else’s healing, thereby denying him any chance of making her a submissive partner, which would cost her freedom and independence. Despite her joy in assisting Rochester, Jane is unwilling to undermine her autonomous existence for anyone else, even for a lover. Her previous issues with norms and traditions enable her to have control over her emotions.

After the above conversation, Rochester ignites jealousy in Jane in an attempt to tease her. Such teasing is considered a means for emotional manipulation and attachment affirmation (Fleischmann et al, 2005, p.50). He tests Jane by starting a rumour regarding his impending marriage to Blanche Ingram, an attractive lady of high-class status. This rumour makes Jane uneasy about her appearance. Jane is aware of how society evaluates women in terms of their beauty; pretty women are valued more than unattractive ones. Since women at that time were seen as objects, attractiveness was viewed as more significant than intelligence in a woman. Beauvoir argues that girls, from a young age, learn the meaning of attractiveness and unattractiveness through both compliments and criticism (P. 322). They quickly learn that to be agreeable is to be lovely and charming in appearance. With Jane having “that sort of face” (Brontë, p. 113), Brontë subverts the ideal heroine’s image in conventional literature.

Rochester’s last attempt to convince Jane to accept the role of a passive partner occurs moments before his proposal: “Jane, be still; Don’t struggle so, like a wild frantic bird that is rending its own plumage in its desperation.” Jane’s famous answer, which aligns with Beauvoir’s existentialism view, is “I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you” (Brontë, p. 293). Rochester’s effort to put Jane in the position of “the Other” pushes her to announce her independence and autonomy. Her powerful response makes him return to his previous acknowledgement of her freedom, saying “My bride is here, because my equal is

here, and my likeness” (Brontë, p. 294), before going backward by saying “You – you strange, you almost unearthly thing! – I love you as my own flesh” (Brontë, p. 294). As Rochester has already referred to Jane by many different names that may imply an effort to dehumanize her, like elf and sorceress, he appears neutral in this section. He vows to love her on an equal footing while continuing to utilize the “othering” vocabulary he has employed so far in the story.

Throughout the wedding preparations, Jane becomes aware of the huge class divide and her financial dependence on Rochester; Rochester reminds her of a “sultan” who endows his wealth and diamonds on a slave (Brontë, p. 237). He wants to decorate her with jewellery and expensive gowns as he “will make the world acknowledge [her] a beauty” (Brontë, p. 299). Jane rejects this objectification. She argues that if she allows him to clothe her in this manner, she will “not be Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin’s jacket” (Brontë, p. 299). Moreover, Rochester tells Jane that she is “a very angel as [his] comforter” (Brontë, p. 300) to which Jane answers, “I am no angel, and I will not be one till I die: I will be myself” (Brontë, p. 300). In this scene, Jane appears as a contemporary woman in Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, “refus[ing] the passivity man means to impose on her” (Beauvoir, p. 801). Jane prefers to embrace her own identity rather than embracing another identity that does not resonate with her. To become an angel means to become passive, submissive, and obedient.

During her stay at Thornfield, Jane’s childhood trauma from the Red Room resurfaces with Bertha Mason, Rochester’s estranged insane wife, trapped in the attic. Bertha might be considered the demon, incarnating the opposite of the “angel in the house” feminine character. Bertha is a Creole, an outsider, and the Other who is not socially accepted and the attic “becomes a complex focal point where Jane’s own rationality and her irrationality (her ‘hunger, rebellion and rage’) intersect” (Gilbert p. 348). Bertha represents Jane’s unconscious, the insane, raging furious side that she has been taught to suppress by Miss Temple throughout her years at Lowood. Bertha is a barrier to Jane’s happiness because she not only embodies Jane’s suppressed fury; she also stands in the way of Jane and Rochester’s marriage. For Jane’s liberation, the mad woman must perish,

which occurs after Jane has fled Thornfield and discovered her caring family and long-desired identity that she has long desired and sought.

Finally, as the marriage is cancelled, Jane declines a pleasant life as Rochester's mistress, despite her love for him and desire to stay with him, since she would become reliant on him and, in a way, bound as a slave. He uses phrases like "You are to share my solitude" and "I'll try violence" (Brontë, p. 348-349) in an attempt to break her into submission. Jane thwarts Rochester attempts when she says, "It would be (wicked) to obey you" (Brontë, p. 364). Jane has preserved her personality throughout this dilemma and has deterred any urge to lose motivation because of her fondness for Rochester. When their relationship strays dangerously close to a typical Victorian one, Jane immediately withdraws, for she departs the following day.

After leaving Thornfield, Jane becomes homeless and penniless. She walks alone, shivering, and hungry. Jane's condition exemplifies "the nameless, placeless and contingent status of women in a patriarchal society" (Gilbert, p. 364). However, Jane stumbles across her relatives' house at Marsh End, the name symbolizing the conclusion of her journey. She will finally discover her identity and position in the world. Jane locates her relatives, and she finally feels a sense of belonging. Her stay with her recently found decent family enables her to rehabilitate and establish a secure base; she overcomes her bitterness over the trauma she endured as a child while living with her terrible relatives, the Reed family. At her new home, several of her wishes are fulfilled: she finally has a warm family, she is intellectually energized by studying alongside her cousins Diana and Mary, and her dream of starting a small school is realized with the assistance of St. John Rivers, who pursues her company more regularly and initially appears to offer a feasible alternative to life with Rochester.

St. John proposes to Jane that she join him as his wife and assistant in his missionaries in India; however, compelled Jane is to agree, she recognizes that such a loveless relationship would smother her aspirations. In many respects, St. John is the opposite of Rochester. He is cold and emotionless, and he is determined to repress Jane's identity and independence. Jane contemplates "I

could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by, because tiresomely importunate instinct reminded me that vivacity (at least in me) was distasteful to him” (Brontë, p. 452). Jane’s ambition to satisfy someone to which she has never felt genuine belonging may explain why she has such difficulty defending herself against St. John’s growing sway over her. She says, “I felt his influence in my marrow – his hold on my limbs” (Brontë p. 459). St. John makes justifications such as “God and nature intended you as a missionary’s wife” (Brontë, p. 456), which implies that she would lose her identity and autonomy since she would be defined by her husband’s occupation and name. Clearly, St. John is striving to establish himself as Master when appealing to Jane to travel with him to India. He says, “It is the cause of God I advocate, it is under His standard I enlist you. I cannot accept on his behalf a divided allegiance: it must be entire” (Brontë, p. 468). By positioning himself as a direct conduit to God, St John is clearly using religion to establish a holy and protected image of himself. However, Jane soon unmistakably rejects him, declaring, “If I were to marry you, you would kill me. You are killing me now” (Brontë, p. 475). Jane, indoctrinated by her years at Lowood, where religion played a significant part in educating females to follow patriarchal authorities, finds it impossible to resist “God’s call”. Nonetheless, on the point of surrendering to St. John’s insistence, Jane hears Rochester’s cry for her, which saves her.

When Jane returns to Rochester, she is a strong independent woman and now the power is balanced between the two. Additionally, having supportive relatives adds to her status since she is no longer lonely. Since he lost his sight, Rochester now relies on Jane as his guide and caregiver. Jane and Rochester eventually marry on equal footing, which was uncommon at the period. Jane realizes her position in life: “No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am [...] To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company” (Brontë, p. 499). By asserting herself as the controller of the narrative with the statement "Reader, I married him" (Brontë, p. 519), Jane reassures the reader that she makes her own choices and that her power to speak out has never been compromised, although it seemed to be at times. Her subsequent account of their marriage dispels any question about their equality, as she declares, “I know

what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth [...] All my confidence is bestowed on him, and all his confidence is devoted to me” (Brontë, p. 519). As a result, at the novel’s conclusion, Jane is unable to say anything more about her relationship, as everything necessary has already been spoken. She has maintained control over her tale, been allowed to express her truth, and has finally identified and been acknowledged by the one she loves. Their partnership is now one of tranquillity and understanding, devoid of insecurity. Between them, there is a bright and cheerful future. Jane obtained the love and connection she desired without jeopardizing her freedom or self-respect.



CONCLUSION

This thesis analyzes the independence of the main female protagonists in *Vanity Fair* (1848) by William M. Thackeray and *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Brontë. This research utilizes the theories of womanhood in Victorian England, as well as Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the Other in *The Second Sex*. The two female characters are presented with many similarities and differences by the authors. Thus, a comparison between Rebecca Sharp and Jane Eyre will be presented in this section to explain the writers' intentions and messages in their portrayals.

Generally, the notion of the "ideal woman" insisted that women's appropriate place was at home. Motherhood was the primary goal for females at that time. Such systems kept women away from the public sphere. With the development of society as Britain transformed into an industrial empire, women finally had the ability to work outside their homes and earn a living. However, women's opportunities were limited to those that matched their "instincts". Women mainly worked as governesses or nurses, as the nature of their work remained domestic, while men were engaged in politics, businesses, and sociability. Such jobs for women were only suitable for low-class citizens, as higher classes viewed women working as shameless.

Owing to the novels' focus on two women, the novels' themes of gender, empowerment, and sexual morality combine dramatically as the women's personalities develop. Thackeray and Brontë offer coherent analyzes of gender disparity and remark on the diverse moral norms that ruled the everyday lives of women and men. Thackeray places his character in a patriarchal society and reveals human vanity and vices. Rather than deliberately criticising women's limited roles, he performs a thorough examination of English society through the journeys of his female characters. In contrast, Brontë delivers a direct and precise criticism of women's subordination without neglecting the societal elements that

contributed to this subordination, thus encouraging women to search for independence and forge their identities.

Simone de Beauvoir, whose theory was employed to analyze these novels, mentions in *The Second Sex* that, in general, women become like slaves to men when they rely on them economically. She states that this servitude begins with the father, who then hands the woman to the husband after marriage. Beauvoir also criticizes discrimination against lower social classes in a capitalist society. She states that while women from higher classes might enjoy some independence, women of the working class were completely enslaved. Beauvoir's main argument in *The Second Sex* is that womanhood is constructed after birth by the cultural and societal aspects in a female's environment, rather than the old idea that womanhood is constructed by instincts and biology. In this regard, the characters of Rebecca Sharp and Jane Eyre accurately reflect that situation.

In *Vanity Fair*, Rebecca's low-class position shaped her personality and limited her chances. From a young age, she knew that her destiny was either to become a governess or a prostitute. For a girl like her, marriage is the only escape from these two destinations. She utilizes her intelligence and wits to secure a wealthy husband that can fulfil her dreams of becoming an acceptable woman in society. Becky feels isolated from the women around her due to the absence of her mother since childhood. She takes advantage of her society's standards as she "fakes" her "femininity" to attract men for marriage. The author uses typical descriptions when he portrays Rebecca's femininity; he emphasizes whiteness, in her clothing and skin colour, and he mentions her pink/red face as she blushes in front of Jos Sedley.

Thackeray created a feminist character in Becky, whether he acknowledged this intention or not, Becky seems to fit well into that category. Becky is an independent woman who does not need men to feel safe and secure. From the start of the novel, Becky is seen as an outsider by the authorities as she is described as a "viper" by her teachers in Miss Pinkerton's academy, where young girls are taught to be "ideal" women in society. Such an attitude represents the patriarchal view of independent girls who challenge the norms. Patriarchal systems consider

such girls monsters or snakes since snakes are hideous and penetrating. Her search for a suitable husband is a business affair that Becky has to indulge in as a poor girl in the early 19th century. At the first opportunity, she abandons her job as a governess to act as the main secretary for Sir Pitt and runs his businesses better than any man, even Sir Pitt himself. Becky even advocates for social and economic equality as she expresses her dissatisfaction with the social constraints placed against her as a poor, orphan girl. Through Becky, Thackeray also criticizes English society during his time since, through other characters, he describes Becky as the most intelligent character in his novel, yet she cannot use her intelligence to respectfully earn a living since she is an impoverished woman. Becky is a businesswoman who makes money even during the most difficult situations in the absence of her husband. Overall, she takes control during her marriage when she feels that Rawdon lacks the intelligence to run a family, especially with their unstable financial situation. Her unforgivable behavior is her treatment of her son. She neglects her son and sees him as a barrier in her life. However, her attitude toward her son is explained (although not justified) from the perspective of business and management. Becky embraces the role of a typical Victorian man of the family with both Rawdon junior and senior. She feels that she must be cold-hearted in pursuing her endeavors, therefore, she is portrayed with a minimal maternal love since she does not act as the typical mother in her family.

Despite his construction of a feminist character, Thackeray does not deviate from the stereotypes of male writers in the 19th century. In his novel, his use of imagery, similes, and metaphors emphasize the gender roles of his era. He describes Becky as a viper and a siren, which was common among male writers who portrayed their women as either angels or demons. Furthermore, he emphasizes female virginity when discussing Becky's method to win the hearts of men. He also encourages women to use hypocrisy rather than openness and honesty, which solidifies the patriarchal stance in suppressing women's voices in general.

In the second novel, *Jane Eyre* (1847), Brontë presents a feminist heroine who forges her identity through multiple stages. Jane survives many obstacles on

her journey to independence without sacrificing her identity even during the darkest hours in her life. Jane meets several women with different personalities who serve as teachers for her to maintain that ultimate goal of freedom. However, the end of the novel makes the reader claim that Jane Eyre both conforms to and subverts the predominant Victorian ideal of women as devoted spouses, content in their motherhood, and kept from man's world inside the boundaries of their homes. Insofar as Jane's journey concludes next to the man she loves and to whom she decides to devote her life, the book conforms to the dominant ideological trend in terms of gender distribution. Although Rochester's selfless behavior in attempting to save his late wife from the fire raises his moral standing, he loses many advantages that had rendered him a desirable husband. In her ultimate choice about her marriage, Jane demonstrates incredible levels of self-sacrifice.

However, Brontë also defies the notion of the "angel in the house" by adding a female Bildungsroman storyline to the conventional romance narrative. In this regard, the heroine has the boldness to leave the safe and secure environment of the Lowood school, where she worked as a teacher, not because she is destitute, but because a woman such as her cannot and will not submit to routine and refuses to embrace a repetitive and limited fate. The protagonist then begins to create her own narrative and asserts herself as a social presence beyond the limitations of Lowood.

Regarding the issue of education, the book clearly preaches and proves its extraordinary value to the development of a whole, independent individual. As the protagonist is female character, she is supposedly (according to Victorian theories of womanhood) less likely to recognize the lifelong impacts and influence of schooling. In addition, during the beginning of her schooling, while in Gateshead, Jane is treated as an inferior because she is plain, dependent, gloomy, and naughty, as she is informed frequently that "one cannot really care for such a little toad" (Brontë, p. 21). While she knows that she will never be beautiful or the center of attention in society, she is determined to flourish in another domain. In this way, the protagonist refuses to submit to a substandard performance and strives to amass the greatest levels of knowledge. Successfully testing collected

knowledge beyond the confines of Lowood embodies the author's message via the examination of her protagonist's instructional method.

Hence, education helps Jane achieve her self-assertive aims, operate socially, and earn Rochester's intellectual and emotional recognition. In Thornfield, she governs Adele and, via a series of fortunate coincidences, meets the man who, after overcoming several barriers, becomes her life partner. In Marsh End, she chooses to change the direction of her domesticated destiny and embark on the heroic endeavor that her cousin St. John suggests. These adjustments in the character's development are facilitated by education and the heroine's comprehension of its function, which Charlotte Brontë uses to empower her.

Another important element in Jane's life is the family and its formation. From the start of her journey, Jane Eyre is traumatized by the absence of her parents and siblings, and this orphanhood is a main factor for her fate. All her unpleasant emotions in early childhood, which led to her confinement in the infamous Red Room and later her exile to Lowood, are perfectly explained and securely traced to her lack of a loving family. The irreplaceable and excruciating absence dictates her self-perception as the excessively reviled Other, not just in terms of attachment, but also in terms of social standing. Due to the lack of family, Jane desires to establish herself, sometimes disregarding the criticism of her society and beginning a gender struggle with the male characters.

In comparison between the two characters, both Rebecca and Jane grew up in a low-class environment lacking a warm family. With Becky living with her bohemian and intelligent father, she was familiar with the public sphere; in fact, as mentioned in the second chapter, she did not enjoy the company of females. As a result, Becky becomes like a conqueror, aiming for the top of society. Jane, on the other hand, endures bullying and mistreatment in Mrs. Reed's house before being sent to Lowood school, making her prioritize a loving and friendly family throughout her journey. At their schools, both characters are considered outsiders due to their constant criticism of the authorities and their dissatisfaction to be

guided blindly by their rules. Furthermore, both criticize the social discrimination placed against them due to their low-class status.

Regarding friendship, Jane is a faithful friend, and her interactions with Helen are straightforward. She tells Helen exactly what she was thinking; she had nothing to hide. Moreover, Jane places a high value on the relationship between her and Helen. When Helen is dying, she accepts the risk of being infected to see her. Jane's actions demonstrate, to some extent, that she is innocent and honest. Unlike death, friendship transcends all other aspects of life. Helen is a loyal companion with whom Jane shares her joys and sorrows whether she is feeling elated or despondent. Rebecca, meanwhile, has a different perspective on friendship. Despite befriending Amelia, who is from an upper-middle-class family, at school, she envies her for the respect she receives due to her wealthy family. Although she criticizes the different treatment she and Amelia receive, Becky has no qualms with joining Amelia's ranks. She views her connection with Amelia as an opportunity to meet a wealthy man who can remove her from a life of poverty. In addition, using her charms and wits, she betrays Amelia by making her husband, George, become infatuated with her. Furthermore, she exploits his weakness in playing cards as she keeps inviting him to play with her husband, Rawdon, to earn money. Generally, Jane meets with multiple characters who serve as life educators for her, while Becky meets none. Brontë uses Helen as an indirect teacher who teaches Jane patience, forgiveness, and endurance. Moreover, Brontë creates the character of Miss Temple, who offers long missing motherly love and care to Jane. Jane needs those characters in her early stages as she embarks on a spiritual journey to liberate herself from the inside before achieving material liberation. With Becky, Thackeray focuses on materialism as Becky, who grew up with her father, does need not such characters since her goal is money-oriented.

Both characters receive employment as governesses after completing their education. Jane's approach to her job is conventional, and she establishes a positive relationship with Adele, while having night-time conversations with Rochester. Becky, however, feels dissatisfied with her job as a governess. She neglects her main job in teaching Sir Pitt's daughters, and instead, she begins to

arrange his businesses and work voluntarily as his secretary. Through these actions, Thackeray forges Rebecca's economic intelligence, which helps her make her own job. In general, Becky, during her stay at Sir Pitt's home, exhibits a tremendous amount of intelligence, while Jane reveals great wisdom, maturity, and knowledge, which is proven in her discussions with Rochester.

In general, both characters aim to be treated with respect and justice, as Becky tells Rawdon, "Do you suppose I have no feeling of self-respect, because I am poor and friendless [...]? Do you think, because I am a governess, I have not as much sense, and feeling, and good breeding as you gentlefolks in Hampshire?" (Thackeray, pp. 162-163). Here, Becky criticizes the social prejudices placed upon women from lower classes as she emphasizes the importance of equality and dignity. This quote echoes another governess's quote: Jane says to Rochester, "Do you think, [...] that because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, that I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! – I have as much soul as you – and full as much heart!" (Brontë, p. 361). Despite these words' similarity, their effect differs. Possibly, this disparity is explained by comparing both authors' introduction to each of their works. Brontë writes, "Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion.... To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns" (Brontë, p. 12). However, Thackeray declares that *Vanity Fair* (1847) is "not a moral place, certainly [...] Some people consider Fairs immoral altogether" (Thackeray, pp. xxxi-xxxii). As a result, Jane remains true to herself while Becky, due to Thackeray's "immoral" fair, fails in maintaining the proclaimed self-respect later in the novel.

Jane and Becky contrast each other in terms of beauty, sexuality, and marriage. Becky is portrayed as an attractive lady who captures the hearts and minds of men wherever she goes. Jane, however, is described as plain and little. Brontë refuses to use the conventional method to portray her heroine, emphasizing the heroine's actions and beliefs rather than her appearance. Conversely, Thackeray describes a physically attractive protagonist who lacks heroine characteristics, as both writers abolish the stereotypical image of protagonists during their era. Regarding sexuality, in contrast to Jane, Becky is a seductive woman who roams in the immoral fair of vanity as she exposes the fragility of

social classes. Jane is portrayed as a woman of God who refuses to stay with Rochester when she discovers his secret marriage. Jane sacrifices high-class status and wealth to protect of her morals, while Becky sacrifices her family in return for a high position in society. Jane is not tempted by Rochester's jewellery and considers it a price for her dignity, liberty, and independence, while Becky fails to maintain such an attitude with her money-oriented relationship with Lord Steyne. Finally, Becky sees marriage as a vital step in social climbing, while for Jane, marriage is considered a sacred relationship in which self-respect and freedom is predominant. Thus, Jane refuses any proposal that would deprive her of her own voice and dignity.

Overall, both characters fall victims of being placed in the category of the Other. Jane is constantly viewed as an outsider, a monster, or an elf by the patriarchal figures in the novel, and Rebecca suffers from the same judgment from the men and women around her, including the male author, the omniscient narrator, William M. Thackeray. They refuse to blindly accept the expectations of their societies and to be categorized as the Other, which is clearly present in both novels as both women literally state: "I'm no angel". Additionally, both women exhibit a strong will to achieve their goals as they endure many hardships and overcome multiple obstacles. In Victorian England, women seeking equal rights to men had to be courageous, strong-willed, and assertive in the face of adversity, acknowledging that disappointment and disaster are unavoidable in life. Adversity and trials made these two women powerful. Toward the end of both novels, each character is at ease in her life. Jane achieves her goal of establishing a loving family, and Rebecca maintains the social class that she has earned and continues to live her life in the bohemian way she is accustomed to.

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